# SERMONS,

BY

DR. GRANT.

VOL. I.

BRITISH MUSEUM

# SERMONS

ON

# VARIOUS SUBJECTS AND OCCASIONS.

By ALEXANDER GRANT, *D.D.*

*MINISTER OF THE ENGLISH EPISCOPAL CHAPEL AT DUNDEE.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Ἡ Σωτηρια γαρ αυτη της πιστεως ἡμων ουκ εξ ευρεσιλογιας αλλα εξ αποδειξεων των θειων εστι γραφων. Cyril. Hierosol. Cat. iv. p. 56. Edit. Oxon.

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE

# *COUNTESS OF ABOYNE.*

MADAM,

THE following Discourses were composed and intended for the pulpit only. The approbation of some who heard them, and their desire to see them in print, has induced me to commit them to the press, with an humble hope that they may be useful to some, beyond the limits of a private congregation, and offensive to none.

I am aware, that a discourse delivered by its author, to a friendly and indulgent audience, may find a more favourable jndgment from them than it can expect under the critical eye of a dis-

a distant and discerning reader; and that many blemishes will be pardoned by the former which cannot escape the observation of the latter. In this respect, I must, like all who appear thus publicly, submit to the candour of those into whose hands these sheets may fall: and as I mean not to court popularity, neither shall I deprecate censure from those who think I deserve it.

The doctrines taught, and the precepts recommended in these discourses, are, to the best of my judgment, those of Christ and his apostles; and if I have failed of doing justice to either, it has proceeded not from design, but inability. With this assurance I commit them to their fate.

Such as they are, *with all their imperfections on their head*, I presume to submit them to your Ladyship's perusal; trusting you will find nothing in them

them incompatible with true piety, or repugnant to the holy religion which it is your glory to profess and to adorn.

I am persuaded the public would pardon me, were I here to enumerate the reasons which determine me to solicit the honour of your Ladyship's patronage to a work of this nature; but you have imposed silence on me, and I have too much respect for your commands to disobey them; especially on a subject justly intitled to the exertion of a more masterly hand: I must however take the liberty to say, that the choice has partly arisen from the polite and even kind attentions I have experienced from your Ladyship and the worthy Lord Aboyne, ever since I have had the honour of being known to you; my gratitude for which, I have no means of showing, but by this candid and public testimony of my esteem for both.

The

The exemplary duty you have untertaken of superintending the progress of an amiable rising family, will naturally draw your attention to religious subjects for their instruction; and I trust neither their principles nor morals will suffer injury by the perusal of these volumes.

Permit me to conclude, with a sincere and affectionate prayer to the Author of all good; that the pious work may prosper in your hands; that health and long life may enable you to finish the task with success; and that by a patient continuance in well-doing, you may obtain an everlasting reward.

I have the honour to be,

With profound respect,

Your LADYSHIP'S

Most obedient, and

Obliged humble servant,

ALEXR. GRANT.

*Dundee, Nov.* 20, 1799.

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SERMON

# SERMON I.

[Preached on the ſecond day of July 1797, being the Author's firſt appearance in the Chapel at Dundee, after having accepted the charge.]

Acts x. 29. (latter part.)

*I aſk therefore for what intent ye have ſent for me?*

IT is ſcarcely of more importance to us to be poſſeſſed of any advantage, than to know it to be ſuch, and to make a proper uſe of it. This maxim, which is entirely agreeable to common ſenſe and experience, is the foundation of the inquiry in the text. Cornelius, a centurion, an officer of ſome diſtinction in the Roman army, had been directed by an angel to ſend to Joppa for Peter, as one capable of teaching him his duty in all reſpects; and Peter was at the ſame time inſtructed by a viſion, to go to Cornelius on his re-

queſt. When he entered the centurion's houſe, he found there a numerous company of his friends and relations, whom he had aſſembled on purpoſe, to be witneſſes of what ſhould paſs between himſelf and the apoſtle, whom he was naturally induced to conſider as a teacher of ſome ſolemn and important truths. To this company Peter addreſſes himſelf; firſt, by reminding them of the diſtinction which the law of Moſes had made, between the Jews and the reſt of the world; inſomuch that it was a thing unlawful for a Jew to have any fellowſhip or communication with one of any other nation: and then declaring to them his readineſs (notwithſtanding the ſeeming impropriety of ſuch a ſtep) to comply with their requeſt, by coming to them as ſoon as they had ſent for him; and as he knew that ſome apology would be neceſſary to juſtify his conduct to his own nation, he gives them as a reaſon for the readineſs of this compliance, that God had taught him not to call any man unclean; that no national diſtinction for the future ſhould give one man any ſuch pre-eminence over another, as would juſtify any opprobrious reflections; for *that in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted of him.*

Having thus far cleared the way to the proper buſineſs of their meeting, he puts the queſtion in the

the text; in order to know whether they were in a proper diſpoſition of mind, to receive and attend to the word of doctrine he was about to deliver to them, and duly ſenſible of the mercy and goodneſs of God, in admitting them to the knowledge of his will and the means of ſalvation. The centurion's anſwer is that of a ſincere and unprejudiced mind, conſcious of honeſt and upright intentions, and deſirous to come to the knowledge of the truth, by the means of God's appointment: for, having declared to the apoſtle the appearance and command of the angel as the reaſon of his ſending for him, he concludes in theſe words: *Now therefore are we all here preſent before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God**.

From the whole of this tranſaction, much uſeful inſtruction may be gathered; but I confine myſelf, at preſent, to that part of it, to which we are more immediately directed by the words of the text; the intention of Cornelius in ſending for the apoſtle, and the reaſon of his compliance with the centurion's requeſt, in readily coming as ſoon as he was ſent for; which I mean to improve by immediately entering into two inquiries, for which the preſent occaſion furniſhes matter; and which

* Ver. 33.

therefore

therefore I hope may be conſidered for the common advantage of us all. The firſt of theſe is,

I. What views and diſpoſitions are proper for receiving the inſtructions of our ſpiritual teachers? And,

II. What qualifications are neceſſary for thoſe who undertake the paſtoral office?

1. The general purpoſe of a Chriſtian miniſtry is, to propagate the knowledge of Jeſus Chriſt and his religion in the world, for ſo runs their commiſſion in the words of our Saviour himſelf, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the goſpel to every creature*;* and it were well for the world, if their inſtructions were attended to, with ſentiments and diſpoſitions in their hearers ſuitable to this intention of their labours. But unhappily this is not always the caſe. Some there are who come to the houſe of God, not to receive inſtruction, but to give judgment. They conſider the preacher, as one whoſe buſineſs it is to compoſe and deliver a ſet diſcourſe, and themſelves as the judges, who are to paſs ſentence upon him and his performance, as they would upon any other exhibition prepared for public entertainment. The effect of this abuſe is juſt what might be expect-

* Mark xvi. 15.

ed.

ed. Such hearers, though they may liſten perhaps with great attention, and criticiſe ever ſo judiciouſly the ſkill and abilities of the preacher, the judgment of the writer, and the addreſs of the orator; though they may be able to tell us by all the rules of criticiſm, which is the beſt and which the worſt diſcourſe, either as to matter, form or delivery, yet never conſider, that what they are pleaſed to call the worſt may contain much matter, which they would do well to apply to themſelves; and I am afraid the lives of ſuch do but too ſeldom ſhow, what ought to be the fruit of that which they allow to be the beſt. But if ſuch could be prevailed on to conſider the conduct of this noble Roman with a proper attention, it might ſerve as an excellent example, to check that ſpirit of cenſure and criticiſm, which we obſerve and cannot but regret, in many who are in other reſpects really good people. He was (as hath been already obſerved) an officer of diſtinction; the name of his rank implies a conſiderable command. He was a man of education too, as appears by his being ſuperior to the vulgar and erroneous prejudices of his country; for inſtead of worſhipping the heathen idols, as was the popular cuſtom at Rome, we are told that he prayed continually to God; the God of nature, the creator and governor of the univerſe,

univerſe, of whoſe exiſtence and attributes the vulgar and unlearned had long loſt all knowledge and conception.

He was alſo a man in good circumſtances as to this world, or what is now in common diſcourſe termed a man of fortune. For though we find he lived in a ſtile of elegance and expence ſuitable to his rank, and could diſpenſe with the abſence of no leſs than three of his attendants at once, from the ordinary ſervice of his family, without incommoding his domeſtic œconomy; notwithſtanding, I ſay, the neceſſary expence of ſuch a houſehold, his circumſtances were ſuch as enabled him to give much alms, and to do a great deal of good to his fellow-creatures: yet this man, with all the advantages of rank, education, and fortune, was not aſhamed to be taught by one whom he had reaſon to think properly authoriſed to inſtruct him. He did not ſend for the apoſtle to try whether he was a maſter of the rules of oratory; whether his compoſition was modelled by the ſubtilties of the ſchools, or the refinements of the Portico; whether his addreſs was inſinuating, or his delivery accurate; whether his ſtyle was ſtudied, his periods elegantly turned, his voice melodious, or his action graceful. No: this good man had far other views. He had been previouſly acquainted that

Peter

Peter would *tell him* * *what he ought to do*; this was what *he* wanted to hear, this all he desired to be told him: and herein doubtless the conduct of this centurion deserves imitation. He wanted information in his duty, and he applied to the Fountain of Wisdom for it: for I think we may fairly presume, that the prayers which he was told were heard, were to this effect, that God would enlighten his mind with the knowledge of his will, and lead him into the way of salvation: for unless this be supposed, it will be difficult to see, why the direction to send to Joppa for Peter, and what happened in consequence of that message, should be the effect of those prayers being accepted. Here then we should begin: we should earnestly pray to God, that he would give to us and to all his people increase of grace, meekly to hear his word, to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the spirit†; and to evidence our sincerity in this matter, we should, according to the powers he has bestowed upon us, give countenance, encouragement, and support, to those ministers of his, who are the most zealous in their endeavours to promote his glory and the good of souls; sedulously attending to their instructions, not with a censorious critical peevish-

* Ver. 6. † Litany.

ness,

neſs, but with a modeſt docility, and a charitable readineſs of mind to hear, like this good man and his friends, all things that are commanded them of God; and to apply the ſolemn and important truths they deliver, ſo as to make them inſtrumental to the reformation of our errors and the amendment of our lives. In ſhort, the intention of all Chriſtian people ſhould be to hear the word of God, the ſacred truths of our holy religion, delivered in purity and plainneſs; and the duties of their reſpective ſtations enforced with becoming zeal and ſerioufneſs; for to this very end it is that God promiſes a goſpel miniſtry by his prophet Iſaiah*: *Thy teachers ſhall no more be removed into a corner; but thine eyes ſhall ſee thy teachers, and thine ears ſhall hear a voice ſaying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.*

The advantages of this gracious promiſe are too many and too obvious to be at preſent enlarged upon: ſuffer me only to obſerve to you, that they are never ſo likely to be obtained, as when the teacher himſelf is influenced by a heartfelt conviction of the truths he utters, and his life is at once the pattern and reſult of his doctrine; when to the knowledge which may be attained by a li-

* Iſaiah xxx. 20, 21.

beral

beral education, he has endeavoured to add as much as may be of that wiſdom which is from above; which, as the apoſtle well obſerves,* is *firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocriſy*:—And this leads me to enquire,

II. Into the qualifications which ſhould accompany the paſtors themſelves.

Now the primary intention of a Chriſtian miniſtry, as already obſerved, is to preach the pure goſpel of Chriſt. The apoſtles, and their immediate ſucceſſors in office, were divinely furniſhed for the work of their miſſion; and the immediate inſpiration of the Holy Spirit precluded any labour or ſtudy of their own to qualify them for it. But ſince the viſible operations of this divine principle have, in the wiſdom of God, been found no longer needful to the Church, our firſt care ſhould be, to obtain ſuch a knowledge of what they have left us upon record, as will, by the bleſſing of God, ſecure us from falſe opinions and pernicious doctrines; to furniſh our minds with ſuch a ſtock of divine knowledge, as may eſtabliſh and confirm our own faith, and ſecure our integrity in the diſcharge of our duty: in order to which, it is ſcarcely neceſſary to add, that we are indiſpenſably

* Jam. iii. 17.

obliged to make the beſt uſe we are able, of all the opportunities of inſtruction and information to which we have acceſs. This, I ſay, ought to be our firſt care, ſince in this, as in all other caſes, it is impoſſible that a man ſhould communicate to others what himſelf does not poſſeſs: and our next ſhould be, to impart our knowledge to our people in ſuch meaſure as our beſt abilities permit, and their particular circumſtances require; and this too in ſuch a manner, both as to form and language, as is beſt ſuited to the capacities of our hearers, and likely to make the moſt laſting impreſſion upon their minds; to encourage the penitent, comfort the afflicted, inform the ignorant, confirm the wavering, convince the unbelieving, and rouſe the indolent; to awaken the fears of the wicked, by ſhowing them the danger of their guilt; and to declare the mercy and loving-kindneſs of God to thoſe who ſincerely believe and obey the goſpel: in ſhort, to approve ourſelves *faithful ſtewards over the houſehold of God, giving to each their † portion of meat in due ſeaſon. And when, for theſe excellent and important purpoſes, we have ſtudied to underſtand the ſcriptures in the genius and purity of their original languages; when we have formed ourſelves upon the

* 1 Corinth. iv. 2. † Luke xii. 42.

beſt

beſt models, and been inſtructed by the ableſt maſters, in all the ſciences neceſſary to our profeſſion, the beſt rules of *argumentation*, and the arts of eloquence and addreſs; and even when cloſe application and long experience have been added to the ſtudies of our earlier years, much will be found yet wanting, to make us * able miniſters of the New Teſtament. We muſt go on in the work whereunto we are appointed, not only furniſhed with the knowledge of our duty, but with conſtancy, firmneſs, and reſolution to perform it, as God ſhall be pleaſed to give us ſtrength and ability for that purpoſe; ſolicitous for nothing but the glory of him in whoſe ſervice we are engaged, and the good of thoſe to whom we are ſent; not preaching ourſelves, but the Lord Jeſus; not ſeeking our own wealth, but his honour. It is true we ought to pleaſe all men for their good to edification †, but to fear no man or number of men in the diſcharge of our conſcience and our duty: for if thus we were to pleaſe men, we ſhould no longer be the ſervants of Chriſt. If either the deſire of pleaſing, or the fear of offending men, can make us ſacrifice the truths or duties of religion to a compliment; by whatever mannerly epithets we may endeavour to palliate the crime, its true and pro-

* 2 Corinth. iii. 6. † Rom. xv. 2.

per

per name is cowardice, and traitorous defection from the beſt of maſters—that maſter we have ſolemnly ſworn to ſerve: and for which we ſhall find ourſelves forſaken and deſpiſed by him, when we ſtand moſt in need of his mercy and protection. Above all things, we muſt ſhew to our people in our own lives, the example of thoſe good works we recommend. It is true indeed, all Chriſtians are bound, by the laws of their religion, to the ſtricteſt purity and holineſs of life; but the miniſters of the goſpel are eſpecially required to ſhine as lights in the world, becauſe the diſtinction of their ſtation, as a city ſet on an hill, renders their conduct more obſervable; and the preſumption of their knowledge, and the dignity of their office, give to their example peculiar force and influence. This therefore is ſo very neceſſary, that without it the profoundeſt ſcholar, with the moſt ſhining parts, the moſt eloquent and accompliſhed preacher, will be but as ſounding braſs, or as a tinkling cymbal. He may indeed preach to others; but if his own life is found to be at variance with his doctrines, no one will be perſuaded that he believes what he ſpeaks; and, what is worſt of all, he himſelf will be a caſt-away. If theſe then are qualifications neceſſary for all miniſters of the goſpel, it may be aſked who poſſeſſes them in that degree that

ſhould

ſhould make him worthy of, or equal to the ſacred office? or (in the language of St. Paul to the Corinthians*), *Who is ſufficient for theſe things?* I muſt own, my brethren, this is an enquiry that goes to my heart: and I ſhould be utterly at a loſs how to reply to it, but that the ſame apoſtle hath furniſhed me with this anſwer—*that our ſufficiency is of God*†; who is no leſs powerful, no leſs kind and merciful now, than he was when he made the apoſtles *able miniſters of the New Teſtament, not of the letter which killeth, but of the ſpirit which giveth life.* On him therefore we depend; in his ſtrength only are we able to go forth; and therefore to all our endeavours muſt be added, continual, devout, and fervent prayers to God, that he, who only can would perfect ſtrength in our weakneſs, would endue us with wiſdom and underſtanding for the work he hath given us to do, and enable us to perform it in ſuch a manner as ſhall be acceptable to himſelf, and profitable to the people committed to our care: ‡ that he would ſo repleniſh us with the truth of his doctrine, and adorn us with innocency of life, that both by word and good example we may faithfully ſerve him in our office, to the glory of his name, and the edification of his church.

* 2. Cor. ii. 16. † 2 Cor. iii. 5, 6.

‡ See the office for ordination of Prieſts.

And

And in this we particularly desire the concurrence of all Christian people, to pray with us and for us, that God would enlighten our minds with the true knowledge and understanding of his word, and that both by our preaching and living we may set it forth and show it accordingly*. And indeed I have thus long insisted on the duties of the ministerial function, chiefly that from what has been said of *our* duty, the Christian laity may more clearly perceive their own. If then it be indeed necessary, that the ministers of the gospel be qualified for the exercise of their profession, in the manner already described, it must certainly be your duty to attend on their instructions, to regard them as a mean of grace appointed by heaven for your spiritual improvement; to consider impartially what you hear, and to practise carefully what you are convinced you ought; to observe strictly the rules established for decent order and edification in the church; to pay that attention and those becoming respects to them that minister to you in holy things, as the honour and interest of religion require; accepting and encouraging our well-meant though imperfect services, and charitably bearing with the many failings and imperfections to which even the best of us are liable:

* Litany.

for

for though we are appointed as ſtewards, a ſtation wherein fidelity is expected as a neceſſary qualification, we are by no means ſet up as models of perfection. This belongs not to fallen humanity, nor can it be found in the character of any man, ſave in that of him * who did no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth.

Our talents, be they many or few, are committed to us in earthen veſſels, always frail and eaſily broken; a conſideration of great uſe and importance, as a leſſon of humility to us, and to you, of charitable condeſcenſion and forbearance with our unavoidable infirmities.

Once more let us return to the centurion. There is one part of this man's character which I cannot omit to mention: He gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always†. By this expreſſion of praying always, however, we are not to underſtand that this good man was perpetually and without intermiſſion on his knees; and I doubt much if we ſhould be juſtified in ſuppoſing, that his prayers were ſo long or even ſo frequent as thoſe of the Phariſees, who arrogated to themſelves ſo much merit from the length and notoriety of their devotions. But his prayers were qualified with the practice of virtue. He feared God with

* 1 Pet. ii. 22. † Ver. ii.

all

all his houſe, and gave much alms to the people. Here then we ſee piety adorned with charity, and charity ſupported by piety, and the union of thoſe two principles in Cornelius, forming the character of true and ſubſtantial holineſs; which rendered him a fit object of the divine mercy, and procured the interpoſition of heaven in his favour. Let his example then excite us to add to our faith virtue, that our prayers and our alms may united aſcend, an acceptable memorial, where neither without the other can avail: for he and he alone * who feareth God and worketh righteouſneſs is accepted of him.

* Ver. 35.

SER-

# SERMON II.

1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

*And my ſpeech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wiſdom, but in demonſtration of the ſpirit and of power; that your faith ſhould not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God.*

THE apoſtle begins this chapter with reminding his Corinthian converts, of his manner of preaching the goſpel while perſonally preſent with them: that it was not with excellency of ſpeech, or wiſdom of words: He did not ſtudy thoſe graces of oratory and ornaments of elocution, by which they were uſed to be entertained by the Grecian orators: for he had laid aſide all thoughts of imitating their arts or ſtudying their manner, and determined to know nothing among them, ſave Jeſus Chriſt and him crucified.

The city of Corinth was the capital of Achaia, and one of the richeſt and moſt populous of all Greece: Its ſituation on an iſthmus or neck of land

between two ſeas, made it convenient for the trade of the eaſtern and weſtern parts of the world, and drew to it a very extenſive commerce from both. The wealth which conſequently flowed into it produced the too common effects of overgrown opulence in great cities, pride, oſtentation, effeminacy, and all manner of * vices: notwithſtanding which, the Corinthians were far from being deficient in philoſophy, politeneſs, and learning.

Such was the ſtate of this people when our apoſtle arrived among them to preach the goſpel of Chriſt, and ſuch the characters with whom he had to contend. The orators, to whom they had been accuſtomed to liſten, obtained all the authority they poſſeſſed, by their powers of eloquence, and their ſkill in declamation, and the arts of addreſs. But the apoſtle had matters to communicate, of more importance to mankind than thoſe orators had any conception of; and withal an authority and commiſſion, to which they were ſtrangers: and therefore he choſe to act in a different manner from them entirely, and to deliver the doctrines of the goſpel with all poſſible plainneſs and ſimplicity.

* Impudicitia inter Corinthos non ſolum tolerata, ſed etiam ſacra habebatur: quod templum Veneris in eorum urbe et publica proſtitutio eam adorantium ſatis manifeſtant. *J. Maternus Error. proph. Relig.*

Whoever

Whoever is acquainted with the character of the apoſtle, muſt allow that he did not avoid the excellency of ſpeech from ignorance of its effects, or want of ability to make uſe of it; for he really was an * excellent ſcholar, well acquainted with Grecian learning, as appears by his knowledge of the poets and philoſophers who wrote in that language, and whoſe words he readily quotes in his diſcourſes and writings. There muſt therefore be ſome other cauſe for this conduct. That cauſe is aſſigned in the words of our text: *That your faith ſhould not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God;* that is, that your belief of the goſpel, and your conſequent obedience of its pure and virtuous precepts, ſhould not appear to be the effect of my wiſdom and eloquence, but that the divine power of God ſhould be manifeſt in your converſion, by an inſtrument ſo apparently weak,

* That Paul was a man of conſiderable learning is generally allowed. That he was a diſtinguiſhed orator, we learn from a fragment of Longinus: but ſtill better from what is recorded of him in the Acts of the Apoſtles. Let any one read in the original his defences before Feſtus, Fœlix, and Agrippa, his addreſs to the Athenians, &c. and he will find every word ſo choſen and ſelected to expreſs his meaning, the matter of diſcourſe ſo arranged, the argument ſo cloſe and energetic, and the diction ſo accurate, and withal ſo elegant, that he muſt find it difficult to determine which moſt to admire, the learning of the ſcholar, the ſkill of the orator, or the judgment of the man.

as

as made your unconverted countrymen, from my plain and unadorned manner of preaching, conclude that the doctrine I taught was no better than fooliſhneſs.

Human faith, or the belief of any thing ſet forth upon human authority, depends on the credibility of the thing, and the ability of the aſſertor to ſet the proofs of any alleged fact or propoſition before us; but for divine faith, we muſt have the teſtimony of divine revelation, becauſe none but God can be able to diſcover to us ſuch truths as religion requires us to believe; nor any authority but his have the power to enforce them. This faith is therefore grounded on the divine authority, and reſolved into the evidence of divine revelation. Upon this foot ſtood the faith of the Corinthians; not in the wiſdom of men, of which, had it been ſufficient to make them perfect, they had abundance in their city; but in the power and wiſdom of God, or that divine revelation publiſhed by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, whom Paul preached: and therefore from this as well as from many other portions of ſcripture, appears the neceſſity of a divine revelation, as a ſure guide in matters of religion, whether relative to faith or practice; becauſe the wiſdom of men was inadequate to the formation of any permanent or ſatisfactory ſyſtem for the purpoſe.

It is univerſally agreed, that the greateſt and moſt ſucceſsful efforts that were ever made by mere natural reaſon, for the diſcovery of divine truths as well as moral duties, and our obligations to believe the one and perform the other, were thoſe of the ancient philoſophers. Thoſe venerable men were really and ſeriouſly engaged in the ſearch after truth and the diſcovery of wiſdom; and the failure of ſuch men in the purſuit, is a convincing proof, that the moſt conſummate human wiſdom ſtands in need of the direction of divine revelation, as a guide to truth and righteouſneſs. That the philoſophers did fail of eſtabliſhing any rational or even feaſible ſyſtem of religion, is notorious to all who have ſtudied their works. After all their reſearches, they never could determine, how or in what manner God was to be worſhipped, nor with what ſervices or ſacrifices the Deity would be pleaſed; neither could they deviſe any rational mode of expiating ſin, whereby ſinners might be reconciled to God and obtain his favour: They never did nor could come to a certainty concerning the immortality of the ſoul, the future rewards and puniſhments of virtue and vice, the chief good of man, and many other points of the greateſt importance. Their perpetual differences upon theſe topics were ſo many, and the jarring opi-

nions

nions of the different ſects ſo eagerly conteſted and defended; that, inſtead of inſtructing mankind in their duty, they perplexed and diſtracted them, and left them at laſt more doubtful and bewildered than downright ignorance had rendered them before. Neither is it to be denied, that ſome of the philoſophers mingled precepts of vice with thoſe of virtue, and none of them had any greater authority for enforcing their dictates than others for diſputing or contradicting them: by which it came to paſs that the whole heathen world, *i. e.* the generality of mankind, under their direction and diſcipline, continued in the groſſeſt idolatry, impiety, and immorality of all kinds. From all which it plainly follows, that either mankind muſt remain for ever involved in darkneſs and error, or there muſt be ſome diſcovery from God, ſome divine revelation to teach them his will, and lead them to truth and righteouſneſs.

It was left for the folly of modern infidels to ſuppoſe, that any thing beſides a divine revelation could effect ſo great a change: for the philoſophers, whoſe wiſdom they would fain be thought to emulate, were fully convinced of the inſufficiency of human reaſon, from the darkneſs and degeneracy of mind of which they were ſenſible, and which they have ingenuouſly confeſſed in their writings

writings which have come down to us. Thus Cicero ſums up the opinions of himſelf and his predeceſſors in philoſophy in a few words. "If (ſays he) " * nature had ſo formed us, as to afford " us a complete and perfect view of herſelf, and " had given us a power to follow her as our guide, " mankind would have wanted no other inſtruc- " tor: But now, the light we receive from her, is " no more than little ſparks, which we quickly " extinguiſh by perverſe opinions and vicious man- " ners; ſo that the true light of nature is no-where " to be found." But though theſe wiſe and able men clearly ſaw the weakneſs and depravity which they deplore, yet they were unable to find out the remedy; becauſe the diſeaſes of the mind, like thoſe of the body, cannot be cured, unleſs the phyſician knows the cauſe of the diſorder. The recovery of mankind from the effects of the fall depending wholly on the will of God, the manner of bringing it about could be known only to himſelf, and therefore could not be an object of human reſearch, or a ſubject for human ſagacity ſo much as to gueſs at. The means whereby it was to be wrought and made effectual for our ſalvation, muſt be his own free and unmerited gift, and therefore could only be learned by a revelation of

* Tuſc. Qu. l. 3. Præf.

his

his will, either immediately communicated by divine inſpiration, or by a teacher ſent and inſpired by him for the purpoſe. Of this the philoſophers were themſelves ſo ſenſible, that Socrates tells the Athenians plainly, * that after his "deceaſe they "would fall into a ſtate of irrecoverable guilt and "miſery, unleſs it ſhould pleaſe God to pity them, "and ſend them another teacher." And Plato ſays in ſo many words, to the ſame people, "† that "whatever is kept in order, and as it ought to be, "is effected by a divine interpoſition."

Now as theſe men, and others who might be mentioned, had no pretenſions to any ſupernatural revelation, or to any authority ſuperior to that of human reaſon; and as they could never unanimouſly agree concerning points of the utmoſt importance; mankind, under ſuch various and contradictory information as they derived from them, muſt ever remain in a ſtate of deplorable uncertainty, and conſequently the groſſeſt ignorance. This melancholy conſequence of man's original tranſgreſſion, and the depravation of his nature which from thence took place, gave occaſion to the merciful plan of his redemption; which was in due time completed, in the glorious goſpel

* Plat. Apolog. Soc.

† De Rep. l. 6. See alſo his Phædon.

of

of Jeſus Chriſt; who with authority and power taught a new and perfect ſcheme of religion, publiſhed its doctrines as divine truths, and its precepts as the will of God, and proved his own title to do ſo, by the miracles and mighty works which he performed.

Whoever with ſober impartiality ſearches the volume in which thoſe doctrines and precepts are recorded, though he cannot have the ocular proof of the miracles by which they were firſt confirmed, will yet find it contain ſo many excellencies, as muſt give it a decided preference above any other ſcheme that was ever propoſed to the world; and that, whether we conſider the ends it propoſes, or the means it provides for the attainment of them.

The great ends it propoſes are, the perfection of our nature, and the happineſs of our ſpecies; to raiſe us above the condition of brutes, to advance us to the felicity and perfection of angels, to aſſure to us the moſt perfect peace and ſecurity in this world, of which our preſent condition admits, and prepare us for the enjoyment of a higher and more permanent happineſs, in a future life which ſhall have no end. The means it preſcribes for the attainment of theſe ends, are ſuch as that while they tend to enlighten our underſtandings, purify our deſires, and keep the lower faculties of our nature

in ſubjection to our reaſon and the laws of God, are no leſs efficacious in promoting the peace and order of ſociety, and the happineſs of all around us: while at the ſame time they are calculated to bring us into ſuch habits of mind and ſuch a frame of ſpirit, as will render us capable of the purer and more refined pleaſures, which it holds out in another life, to all who in this, comply with the terms upon which its promiſes are ſuſpended. The precepts of the philoſophers were in many inſtances wiſely calculated for the good of ſociety in this world; but having no knowledge, or at beſt but a very confuſed idea, of any life beyond the preſent, they could not poſſibly propoſe to their diſciples any ſcheme of virtue, with a view to the ſpiritual enjoyments of ſuch a ſtate. Here their morality fell ſhort, and here the morality of Chriſt's religion out-ſtrips that of all other inſtitutions; being not only in itſelf more pure and ſublime, but enforced by motives and ſanctions more noble and exalted: and that as relating to God, our neighbour, and ourſelves.

The heathens gave to their imaginary gods the form and figure of men, and even of beaſts and birds and creeping reptiles. They believed them actuated by the brutal paſſions of luſt, revenge, malice, and cruelty, and even aſcribed to them ſuch baſe

baſe and criminal actions, as the common decency of mankind forbids to be named. Chriſtianity, on the contrary, ſets out with giving us a true knowledge of God, his nature and attributes; that he is a pure, eternal, and unchangeable ſpirit, poſſeſſing in himſelf all imaginable perfections, without the leaſt ſhadow of folly, mutability, or weakneſs of any kind: that inſtead of the barbarous and brutal characters of thoſe infamous deities whom the heathens worſhipped, we are to adore one living and true God, of infinite purity and goodneſs; kind and beneficent to all his creatures; whoſe mercies are over all his works; whoſe power created, and whoſe providence preſerves the heavens and the earth, and whoſe goodneſs extends even to the meaneſt of his * creatures: that inſtead of an arbitrary, cruel and vindictive tyrant, which was the character of many of the heathen gods, and conſiſted well with their general notions of the Deity, he is a mild and gracious being, pitying the infirmities, and, upon repentance, pardoning the errors of mankind; whereof he has given the greateſt poſſible proof, by ſending his own Son to die for our ſins, and redeem us from eternal death, that he might engage our love and obedience, and that we by that means may obtain eternal happineſs,

* Mat. x. 29, 30.

in

in that world of which no knowledge could be obtained but through the goſpel. By this knowledge of the nature of God as a pure and immaculate ſpirit, we are led to the true and only acceptable manner of worſhipping him. We eaſily conceive, that ſuch a holy and undefiled ſpirit cannot take any pleaſure in the unnatural and ſuperſtitious ſervices of heathen idolatry, nor be appeaſed by the deſtruction of the innocent brute creatures, which he has created, not for his uſe, but ours; but by a ſerious attention of mind, by a fear and reverence of his name, perfected by love; by purity of heart, and pious though imperfect obedience of his commands. This is what our Lord, in his ſublime and comprehenſive ſtyle, calls *worſhipping in ſpirit and in truth;* which not only keeps up a conſtant ſweet and delightful communication between God and the pious ſoul, but eminently alſo prepares us for the heavenly exerciſe of praiſe and adoration; which, if we ſhall be counted worthy to receive the rewards of piety, will employ us to all eternity.

And whereas the heathen, and even the Jewiſh mode of worſhip, conſiſted of external rites and ceremonies; our Lord has in mercy delivered us from the bondage of thoſe carnal ordinances, and inſtituted only two outward viſible ſigns, of thoſe inward

inward and ſpiritual graces, which he is ever ready to beſtow upon all who ſincerely and devoutly aſk them. Theſe are baptiſm, by which we are admitted into the ſociety of Chriſt's church, and become entitled to the privileges annexed to ſuch admiſſion; and the Lord's ſupper, by which we declare our willing continuance in that ſociety, thankfully commemorate the great work of our redemption, and renew the covenant of our baptiſm, by reſolving and endeavouring to continue ſtedfaſt in that faith and obedience which his religion requires.

But becauſe men, through a ſenſe of their own infirmities, might be diſcouraged from attempting to live up to the perfection of a law ſo pure, and the conſciouſneſs of their manifold offences againſt that law, might keep them in perpetual dread of the divine juſtice, and ſcare them from approaching him; the ſame goſpel aſſures us, that the Son of God, who took our nature upon him, has in that nature ſatisfied the divine juſtice by dying for us: and that we may not be diſcouraged from coming to God, and attempting to pleaſe and obey him, he has himſelf become our interceſſor with the Father, to preſent our ſupplications, and plead our cauſe, at the throne of mercy. This is the doctrine of St. Paul, and the account which the

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New Teſtament gives of the redemption wrought for us by Jeſus Chriſt: That his death was a ſatisfaction made to the divine juſtice for the ſins of mankind; that through faith in him we are promiſed pardon upon repentance; that being forgiven we are juſtified in the ſight of God, and reconciled to him; having our hearts ſanctified by the graces of the holy ſpirit, enabling us to will and to do the good pleaſure of God, and thereby to continue in his favour; that for the ſame end he mediates and intercedes with God in our behalf, while we continue in this life, and afterwards beſtows upon us life eternal. This doctrine Paul preached to the Corinthians, in great plainneſs and ſimplicity of ſpeech; not that the ſcience of eloquence, or the excellence of ſpeech, is any detriment to a man's preaching, or that we are forbid to make choice of the beſt language or the moſt elegant ſtyle in preaching the goſpel; nay, if we poſſeſs the powers of perſuaſion, by the moſt engaging manner and addreſs, it is our duty to uſe them, for convincing men of the truth of the goſpel, and inducing them to lead holy and virtuous lives: But as theſe talents are beſtowed upon men in different degrees, as it pleaſes God to diſtribute his gifts, it was not fit that the propagation of the goſpel ſhould depend upon any endowments which

which could be conſidered as the effect of ſtudy, or abilities merely human; but on ſomething which ſhould at once demonſtrate to the conſciences of men, that the ſpirit of God gave to the preacher a power which could not be derived from any aſſiſtance or authority leſs than his own. This the apoſtle juſtly calls the demonſtration of the ſpirit and of power: and, whatever may be ſaid, if the inward operation of the ſpirit does not accompany the matter preached, all the eloquence to which the ableſt of the ſons of men can attain, will be as ſounding braſs or as a tinkling cymbal. That God may enlighten the minds of our preachers with the knowledge of his truth, and enable them by his ſpirit to ſet forth his true and lively word; and that it may pleaſe him to give his people increaſe of grace to hear it meekly, to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the ſpirit; ſhould be the earneſt prayer of all believers in Chriſt, and in this we beſeech thee to hear us, good Lord, through Jeſus Chriſt our Saviour. Amen.

SER-

# SERMON III.

LUKE XV. 7.

*I ſay unto you, That likewiſe joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons, which need no repentance.*

THESE words are the concluſion of one of our Lord's parables, which was ſpoken to ſhow the goodneſs of Almighty God in calling ſinners to repentance, and to correct that erroneous principle of the Scribes and Phariſees, by which they were induced to cenſure him for admitting ſuch to hear his doctrine. We are told, at the beginning of the chapter, that our Saviour's audience at this time was chiefly, or at leaſt partly, compoſed of publicans and ſinners. To underſtand the meaning of this deſcription of perſons, we muſt recollect that the publicans were the collectors of the taxes which were impoſed upon the Jews by the Roman Emperors. While thoſe taxes were in the hands of the government, they were gathered by a juſt

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and equitable mode of taxation, proportioned to the property of thoſe who were to pay them: but when the revenues of the empire were farmed out to ſuch monied men as were able to advance large ſums to government upon the credit of the taxes, they became a grievous and intolerable nuiſance; for the farmers of the revenue, in order to make the moſt of their bargain, employed ſuch creatures of their own as would ſtick at no acts of oppreſſion or extortion, to increaſe the gain of their employers. This kind of office, it is evident, could not be executed but by men of bad principles and profligate characters; and therefore we find them in the New Teſtament generally claſſed with ſuch: as publicans and heathens, publicans and harlots, publicans and ſinners: and even by thoſe who employed them, they were conſidered as little better than thieves and ſharpers. As a proof of this, it is ſaid, that Theocritus, being once aſked which was the moſt ravenous of all beaſts of prey, made anſwer, that among the beaſts of the wilderneſs they were the bear and the lion, but among thoſe of the city they were the publican and the paraſite. Among the Jews, the name and office of a publican was the moſt odious of all things: thoſe of their own nation who undertook the employment were, by ſo doing, cut off from all ſociety

and communion with the reſt of their people: they were not admitted to join in the public worſhip, either in the temple or ſynagogue: they could hold no office of truſt or honour in the ſtate: their teſtimony was not held as legal evidence in a court of juſtice, nor would their offerings be accepted at the temple, but were held in the ſame deteſtation as the price of proſtitution or of blood. Our Saviour's preaching to a multitude of ſuch people gave high offence to the Scribes and Phariſees, who we are told (ver. 2.) murmured, ſaying, *This man receiveth ſinners, and eateth with them.* We ſhall not be much ſurpriſed at this circumſtance, if we conſider the different character of theſe men from that of the perſons already deſcribed. The title of Scribe in ſcripture means an able and ſkilful writer, a doctor or teacher of the law, a man of learning, who underſtands buſineſs, and is qualified to manage his clients' affairs. The profeſſion was in high honour under the Kings of Judah, and had, ever ſince the days of David and Solomon, been held in great eſtimation by the people, on account of their knowledge and learning. The Phariſees again were a diſtinguiſhed and remarkable ſet among the Jews. Their origin is not very certainly known, nor is it of importance for us at this time to make any enquiry about

about it. They take their name from a Hebrew word ſignifying ſeparation, becauſe they ſeparated or diſtinguiſhed themſelves from other Jews, by making profeſſion of ſuperior piety, and a ſtricter manner of life than even the law of Moſes had enjoined. At the time of our Lord's appearance in Judea, they were very numerous there; and the reputation they had acquired among the people, on account of their learning and the apparent ſanctity and regularity of their lives, gave them great authority with their countrymen. They made long prayers, faſted often, gave much alms, were ſtrict and even ſcrupulous in the performance of all the ceremonial parts of the law. In ſhort, theſe were the men who *truſted in themſelves that they were righteous, and deſpiſed others*, who, in the language of the prophet, would ſay to their brethren, * *Stand by thyſelf, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou.*

No wonder then, I ſay, that ſuch men, puffed up with ſelf-conceit, and ſwelled with popular applauſe, ſhould murmur, that a perſon ſtyling himſelf a prophet, nay and even more than a prophet, ſhould herd with ſuch looſe and profligate characters as they would not ſuffer to approach them. They would naturally argue thus: Here is a pub-

* Iſa. lxv. 5.

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lic and profeſſed teacher of righteouſneſs, pretending to divine inſpiration and a commiſſion from God, who is all holineſs, purity, and righteouſneſs; and yet this man, who, if he were a true prophet, would moſt likely aſſociate with us, who are as righteous and holy as prophets ourſelves; this man, who is ſo little ſparing of us in his reproofs, who ſcruples not to accuſe us of guile and hypocriſy, is not aſhamed to be ſeen in the company of profligates, publicans, and ſinners, nay even to partake of their hoſpitality, and to eat with them. Surely this man can be no better than the * company he keeps: therefore he can be no prophet at all.

To rectify theſe falſe notions, and at the ſame time to illuſtrate the riches of God's grace, he appeals to their own reaſon and the common ſenſe of all mankind, to juſtify his conduct in this reſpect, by the following parable. *Which of you having an hundred ſheep, if he loſe one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderneſs, and go after that which is loſt until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his ſhoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, ſaying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my ſheep which was loſt. I ſay unto you, That likewiſe joy ſhall be in heaven over*

* A Socio noſcitur.

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*one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons, which need no repentance.*

Obſerve here, with what care and anxiety the prudent ſhepherd is ſuppoſed to ſearch for his ſtrayed ſheep. It is not ſuppoſed that this is any particular or favourite ſheep; far leſs can it be ſuppoſed of greater value than the ninety and nine which are ſtill ſafe before him; and yet he leaves them all, to go in ſearch of this one till he find it. And when he hath found it, he truſts not the ſilly wanderer to return by itſelf, neither is he contented with driving it before him, but in a tranſport of joy lifts it upon his ſhoulders, and carries it home. And upon his arrival there he calls together his friends and neighbours to congratulate him, and partake of his joy, not becauſe he has an hundred ſheep, but becauſe he has recovered the one he had loſt.

The parable is an inſtance of the common practice of mankind, with reſpect to property or poſſeſſion of any kind. The gifts of nature and providence, we are often apt to undervalue while we enjoy them; but when they are taken from us, we then perceive their value, and endeavour with care and anxiety to recover our loſs. By this metaphor the goodneſs of God to ſinners is exemplified. A ſheep is of all domeſtic animals the moſt

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apt to wander, and the leaſt likely to find its way back, when once it has deviated from its wonted paſture. By the alluſion to this animal in the parable, our Lord repreſents, in plain and appoſite language, the caſe of a ſinner who has gone aſtray from the paths of virtue, and who being entangled in the ſnares of vice, has been ſo far deluded from his duty, that he finds it impoſſible to return by any wiſdom or contrivance of his own: And by the care of the owner to find out and recover the loſt ſheep, is fitly repreſented the goodneſs of God, in calling ſuch a ſinner to repentance, and affording him the means of reformation. This God has done by ſending his Son into the world, to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt: that good ſhepherd whoſe own the ſheep are, and who laid down his life for the ſalvation of his flock. The helpleſs condition of the loſt ſheep, expoſed to the attacks of the ravenous beaſts of the wilderneſs, is a lively emblem of the deſperate and defenceleſs ſtate of an unconverted ſinner, expoſed to the wiles and temptations of the devil, that *roaring lion who walketh up and down ſeeking whom he may devour*. This is a ſad and deplorable caſe: but it is the caſe of every ſinner, till Chriſt the great ſhepherd finds him out, and on his powerful and triumphant ſhoulders carries him home. The ſcriptures

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frequently repreſent our Saviour under the character of a ſhepherd. *Thus the pſalmiſt, alluding to his providential care, ſays: *The Lord is my ſhepherd, I ſhall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green paſtures: he leadeth me beſide ſtill waters. He reſtoreth my ſoul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteouſneſs for his name's ſake.* To this beautiful alluſion correſponds another not leſs ſo of the prophet † Iſaiah: *He ſhall feed his flock like a ſhepherd: He ſhall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his boſom, and ſhall gently lead thoſe that are with young.* Theſe pathetic and tender expreſſions were familiar to the Jews, who, even from the days of Jacob their progenitor, had been ſhepherds, and dealt much in flocks and herds; and are therefore particularly choſen to ſtrike the apprehenſion of that people, and inculcate the tender care of Chriſt, in inſtructing his hearers as they were able to bear it, and uſing all proper methods to reclaim the wicked. And ſtill more to impreſs upon their minds his kind ſolicitude for their recovery, our Lord aſſures them, in the words of our text, that the ſincere repentance of a loſt and miſerable ſinner, makes no inconſiderable addition to the joy of heaven itſelf. *Joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth.* By comparing

* Pſal. xxiii. 1. † Iſa. xl. 11.

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the different paſſages of the Old Teſtament in which the word heaven occurs, it appears that the Jews acknowledge three heavens. Firſt, the aerial heaven, where the birds fly, the winds blow, and the clouds are condenſed into ſhowers. Secondly, the firmament, or heaven where the ſtars are placed; and thirdly, the heaven of heavens, or third heaven, which is the place of God's peculiar reſidence, the habitation of angels and bleſſed ſpirits. This is the holy place of God, entirely ſeparated from the impurities and imperfections, the changes and alterations of the lower worlds; where he dwells in eternal glory and peace; where there is fulneſs of joy, and rivers of pleaſure, for ever flowing and for ever full. How then, it may be aſked, can the inhabitants of ſo bleſſed a region be more joyful on the converſion of a ſinner than they are already? Or how can any addition be made to the happineſs of ſuch a place? Now with reſpect to God himſelf, it is certain, that his happineſs being infinite and eternal, as are all his perfections and attributes, admits of no addition whatever; but when expreſſions ſuch as theſe are made uſe of, it muſt with reſpect to him only mean, that he accepts the homage of his faithful ſervants, or the ſincere repentance of ſinners, with ſuch condeſcenſion and complacency as would

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in finite minds, like ours, be an addition to our happineſs: and therefore the language is fitted to the weakneſs of our capacities, which are unable to comprehend the operations and perceptions of an infinite mind, otherwiſe than by ſuch repreſentations of them as come within the ſphere of human conception. But with regard to the angels and other inhabitants of that bleſſed region, their minds, though greatly ſuperior to ours, have this in common with us, that they are created and conſequently finite, and therefore we may fairly conclude, that their happineſs admits both of increaſe and diminution. That theſe benevolent ſpirits have pleaſure in ſeeing the happineſs of mankind promoted and increaſed, we have no reaſon to doubt. The joyful hymn which was ſung by an innumerable chorus of them, to celebrate the birth of our Lord, who was the Saviour of men, is a proof of their affection for our ſpecies; and to go no farther, we are told at the 10th verſe of this chapter, that in the preſence of the angels of God, there is joy over one ſinner that repenteth. But that this joy ſhould exceed that which takes place for ninety and nine juſt perſons which need no repentance, may require explanation. In order to this it muſt be remembered, that our Lord was ſpeaking

of the repentance of publicans and ſinners; perſons of looſe and ſcandalous lives; and conſequently by the juſt perſons here put in oppoſition to them, muſt be meant thoſe very Scribes and Phariſees, who murmured at his keeping ſuch company, and thought themſelves juſt or righteous perſons, on account of their ſtrict and literal obſervance of the law of Moſes. To thoſe men nothing could be better adapted than the doctrine of the text; to convince them that true repentance was of more account in the ſight of God, than all their boaſted legal righteouſneſs; and one truly devout, ſincere, and humble penitent, of more value than an hundred ſuch proud and ſelf-conceited perſons as they, who pretended to juſtify themſelves before God by their works, and thought themſelves above the neceſſity of repentance. Such I think muſt be the meaning of juſt perſons in the text; for if the word juſt be taken in an unlimited ſenſe, as implying perfect innocence in the ſight of God, and an exemption from ſin, no ſuch perſons are to be found, for* *all we*, ſays the prophet, *like ſheep have gone aſtray*. †And the preacher has told us, that *there is not a juſt man upon earth who doeth good and ſinneth not*. With what face then can we ap-

* Iſa. liii. 6. † Ecc. vii. 20.

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proach the throne of grace, truſting in our own righteouſneſs? Such thoughts, however they might accord with the ſupercilious vanity of a ſelf-conceited Phariſee, can have no place in the mind of a true believer in Chriſt. For we know that he came into the world to ſave ſinners, becauſe without him no human ſoul could be ſaved; and he is ſet forth as the propitiation for the ſins of the whole world, becauſe the whole world were ſinners. But if one man could have been found without ſin, ſuch an one would have needed no propitiation, and conſequently for him the Redeemer had not died. But he died for all, becauſe all had ſinned. And if we have the preſumption to think or to ſay, that we have no ſin, *we deceive ourſelves, and the truth is not in us:* But if we come to him in the becoming guiſe of humble and penitent ſinners, confeſſing our ſins, and reſolving to forſake them, he is merciful, and will pity our infirmities; he is faithful to his promiſes, and will forgive us our ſins; he is juſt and true in all his ways, and will cleanſe us from all unrighteouſneſs; not for any merit or deſert of ours, nor for any works of the law which we have done, but through the merits and interceſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, who came, as was foretold of him,

him*, to finiſh tranſgreſſion, make an end of ſin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlaſting righteouſneſs. To him, with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be all glory and honour, world without end. Amen.

* Dan. ix. 24.

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# SERMON IV.

LUKE xv. 24.

*For this my ſon was dead, and is alive again; he was loſt, and is found. And they began to be merry.*

THIS chapter conſiſts of three beautiful apologues or parables, all intended to inculcate the fundamental precept of Chriſtianity, *viz.* repentance. We ſee by the parallel paſſage in the 9th of St. Matthew's goſpel, that Jeſus was entertained at the houſe of that Evangeliſt, whom he had called from the receipt of cuſtom, to be a prime witneſs of his miniſtry and a publiſher of his goſpel. On this occaſion Matthew thought proper to make an entertainment for our Lord, to which he alſo invited ſeveral of his own friends and acquaintance. This invitation our Lord was pleaſed to accept, and this chapter probably contains the moſt edifying part of the converſation.

We are here to obſerve, that the company conſiſted of perſons widely different from each other,

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in character and external deportment. One part conſiſted of publicans, who, as well as their entertainer, were the collectors of the Roman Emperor's taxes; and who by this their office, and probably by the rigour with which they exacted the revenues of the empire, were hateful to the Jews, and by them branded with the general appellation of ſinners. The other part of the company was made up of Scribes and Phariſees: men filled with pride and ſelf-conceit; aſſuming a ſort of ſtyle above the reach of other men; as having peculiarly acquired the privilege of uncommon ſanctity, by the ſtrictneſs of their lives, and the reputed purity of their manners. It was therefore neceſſary for the heavenly teacher, to adapt his diſcourſe to the caſes of both; which indeed we find he did, in ſuch a manner as diſcovers the divine benignity of the Saviour, the awful authority of the Teacher, and the nervous and pathetic addreſs of the Orator.

In the parables of the loſt ſheep and the loſt piece of money, we have a lively repreſentation of the infinite mercy and placability of God to ſinners, delivered in clear and explicit terms, to encourage the hopes of thoſe who heard him, and engage them to repent; while with equal dexterity he checks the inſolence and ſpiritual pride of the Scribes and Phariſees, who had the preſumption to fancy themſelves

themſelves free from ſin, and conſequently above the neceſſity of repentance; at the ſame time that with great condeſcenſion he corrects that error of their prejudice, in cenſuring him for being found in the company of perſons whom they held in ſuch contempt. Theſe were the ſubject of my laſt diſcourſe.

In the parable now before us, and of which I have taken the concluſion for the ground of this, we ſee the riſe and progreſs of vice in the ſoul; its fatal effects, its miſerable end, the dawn of reaſon producing repentance, the confeſſion of an ingenuous mind labouring under the preſſure of an awakened conſcience, the return of a ſinner to his duty, and the mercy of God in accepting his penitence, all united in a ſtyle of narrative, ſo plain yet ſo elegant, ſo ſimple yet ſo pathetic, that while it conveys divine inſtruction to the underſtanding, cannot fail to intereſt the feelings and affect the heart. Let us examine this inſtructive tale.

A certain man had two ſons. He had it ſeems no more. The delight of his eyes, the hope of his life, the expected props of his declining years, were two ſons. And the youngeſt ſaid to his father, *Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.* There is ſomething in this demand, which at firſt ſight looks not well. A wiſh to become independent of his father, before

fore the father thought proper to make him ſo.

Obſerve here, it was the younger ſon who made the imprudent demand. Alas! fond youth; thy tender years and inexperience are ſome excuſe for thy impetuoſity, while they prove the impropriety of thy ardency, to be gone from the ſtrict regularity of a father's houſe, the watchful care of the paternal eye: yet the good man complies, and divided unto them his living. The parable does not ſay that the diviſion was equal, nor does the ſon's demand extend ſo far: For he does not ſay give me half of thy eſtate, but only give me the portion that falleth to me. Whatever proportion this bore to his father's fortune, he no ſooner gets poſſeſſion of it, than he thinks of retiring from his father's preſence: for in a few days he takes his journey into a far country. This is perfectly natural. He, though bent on a vicious courſe, was not yet loſt to the ſenſe of ſhame. His father's virtue he knew would revolt at his indiſcretions. He could not brook the repetitions of paternal remonſtrance, and therefore reſolved to remove to ſuch a diſtance as to be out of the reach of expoſtulation and reproof.

This is moſt commonly the caſe with ſinners. They retire from their father's houſe. They leave the houſe of God. They neglect the ordinances of religion:

religion: they forſake the places of public worſhip, where they would be reminded of their duty, and told of their faults; and there begins their ruin.

But I have ſaid this youth was bent on a vicious courſe. This appears from his very firſt ſtep in the world. Had his deſigns been virtuous, had his plan been honourable, he need not have gone ſo far from home to put it in execution. Where could he go to find a friend, ſo willing to adviſe, ſo careful to direct him; ſo watchful to guard his intereſt, to guide his inexperience; ſo tenderly intereſted in his happineſs, as that very father on whom he had reſolved to turn his back?

We are not here detained with a long dull narration of the father's kind advices to his ſon; of the objections he made to his journey, or the arguments he uſed to diſſuade him from the raſh deſign: every reader may ſuggeſt them. Every parent will feel them. But they were all thrown away. The young man, raſh, headſtrong and impatient of controul, takes his journey into a far country, and there *waſtes his ſubſtance in riotous living*. While his fortune held out, he never thought of returning home; but when it was all ſpent, he joined himſelf to an inhabitant of that country, who ſet him to feed ſwine. Behold now

the diſmal conſequences of his youthful folly, his intemperate raſhneſs, and invincible obſtinacy; and behold in his fate, that of every obſtinate and incorrigible offender. Of all the offices to which a Jew could be appointed, none could be ſo hateful and humiliating as feeding of ſwine; for being by their law forbidden to eat the fleſh of thoſe animals, and accuſtomed to look upon it as an abominable thing, they had ſuch an abhorrence for them, that they could not bear to touch and hardly to ſee them. Yet this unhappy youth, well born, well educated, and once poſſeſſed of ſo much better proſpects, is now forced to undertake the care of thoſe deteſted creatures, and even envies them the huſks on which they fed. Woful and forlorn as his condition muſt be, ſuch is the ſtate of every man who perſiſts in a vicious and profligate courſe. From peace and tranquillity, from the hopes of immortality, and the pleaſures of innocence and virtue; he is reduced to feed on the huſks of inveterate ill habits, of ungoverned paſſions, and rebellious luſts; and even with them (like this prodigal ſwine-herd) he cannot be ſatisfied. Indeed it is not poſſible to ſatisfy the cravings of irregular and ungoverned appetite: and if it were poſſible, the ſatisfaction would be no better than huſks.

A bad

A bad man may find pleaſure in his vices no doubt. So did this prodigal in his riotous living. But riotous living brought him to want, and ſo it will every man who is guilty of it.

Let us view this young man in the moſt conſpicuous moments of his life, and ſee the lamentable contraſt which ſin produces. See him leaving his father's houſe, young, healthy, vigorous, fluſhed with hopes, void of fear, and inſenſible of danger. How happy does he feel at freedom from reſtraint! at being let looſe from the pain of ſtudy, the confinement of buſineſs, or the care of pleaſing his father, by a conduct contrary to his own opinions, or oppoſite to the gratification of his favourite paſſions; above controul, and entire maſter of his actions, he dreams of nothing but delight, and all is paradiſe before him. But view him *now*, when this gay deluſive phantom is no more; and ſee what dreadful havock ſin has made in his affairs. He, who could not be ſatisfied with the riches and plenty of his father's houſe, now wants even the neceſſaries of life. Inſtead of proper decent apparel, and the innocent tranquillity of a regular family, behold rags and miſery. The delicate viands, and rich wines, which uſed to flatter his palate, and even precede his appetite, muſt no more be thought of; but their place is now to be ſupplied

plied with huſks; and even thoſe in quantity not ſufficient to allay the natural cravings of hunger.

Where are now the gay companions of his jovial hours? The friends who cajoled, and the paraſites who flattered him? Alas! theſe were the inſects of a ſummer's day; the locuſts that fed upon his improvident bounty. The chilling blaſt of penury has blown upon his fortunes, and ſhown the deceitfulneſs of their attachment, by ſweeping them off for ever from his view. The jovial ſong, the noiſy jeſt, the intemperate mirth of midnight revelry, are now ſucceeded by the ſighs, the tears, the groans of ſad and melancholy ſolitude.

Worſe yet: yes, worſe than all, is the miſerable condition to which a vicious courſe reduces a ſinner. His conſcience, that inſeparable companion, that incorruptible witneſs, whoſe intimate knowledge of all his tranſactions he cannot deny, and whoſe teſtimony is not now to be ſtifled with noiſe or drowned in wine, accuſes him of guilt: accuſes him with evidence which cannot be eluded, before his own heart, whoſe judgment is already againſt him; and if his heart condemns him, he knows that God is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things; and that the ſentence he now paſſes on himſelf, is but the foretaſte of that which will be pronounced in thunder by the judge of all

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the earth. This conſtitutes the anguiſh of a wounded ſpirit, who can bear it? * *The arrows of the Lord ſtick faſt in him, and his hand preſſeth him ſore. There is no health in his fleſh, becauſe of God's diſpleaſure; there is no reſt in his bones, by reaſon of his ſins.*

I have not yet mentioned the many other evils of a ſinful courſe; the infirmities and bodily diſeaſes brought on by vice and intemperance. Why ſhould I deſcribe the premature old age, the haggard countenance, the feeble limbs, the ruined conſtitution of him whom ſin has hurried to his deſtruction; who hath waſted his ſubſtance with riotous living? Nature ſickens at the ghaſtly picture. Humanity, diſguſted with the object, rather wiſhes to contrive the cure. And here the parable comes ſeaſonably to our aid, in pointing out the only remedy that can bring about the recovery of a ſinner.

We are told, that when this youth came to himſelf, the firſt reflection he made, was comparing the miſery of his own preſent condition, with the happineſs of thoſe whom he had formerly conſidered as his inferiors; the menial ſervants of his father. *How many hired ſervants of my father have bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with hun-*

* Pſal. xxxviii. 2.

*ger!*

*ger!* Misfortune had taught him to think; and his thoughts naturally turned to the contemplation of his own ſufferings. And here the alluſion anſwers exactly to the thing alluded to. A ſinner muſt ſee the bad effects, the miſerable conſequences of ſin, before he can reſolve to forſake it. But when this is once done, we may count the happy change begun, and his complete reformation probably at no great diſtance. Accordingly we find this youth reſolved to apply for pardon, where he ſaw he had given offence; to throw himſelf at the feet of that affectionate parent, whoſe indulgence he had formerly experienced; and by a manly and ingenuous confeſſion of his guilt, try to rekindle in his father's boſom, ſome ſhare of that paternal tenderneſs, which he could not but own he had abuſed. *I will ariſe*, ſaid he, *and go to my father*, &c. When a ſinner reflects upon the guilt and miſery of his condition, the danger of his ſituation, and the penalty to which he is liable from divine juſtice; this naturally leads him to humility: humility begets contrition; and an humble and contrite heart is the moſt acceptable ſacrifice to God, that ſinful man can offer. With this diſpoſition the ſon reſolves to addreſs his father.

But now mark the conduct of the father, and in him view the unſpeakable goodneſs and condeſcenſion

deſcenſion of divine mercy. While the ſon was yet afar off, the father ſaw him, and had compaſſion on him, and ran to meet him. Forgetting his faults, he pitied his misfortunes, and ran and fell on his neck, and kiſſed him. Here the ſon begins his humble and contrite confeſſion; but before he was able to pronounce all that he meant to ſay, his father interrupts him. But how does he interrupt him? Not by inſulting his miſery; not by renewing or aggravating his ſorrow, nor reproaching him of folly or ingratitude. No; but by a kind and immediate order to his ſervants for his accommodation, and making a feaſt for his entertainment. *Bring out the beſt robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and ſhoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry, for this my ſon was dead and is alive again, was loſt and is found. And they began to be merry.* Hence then ariſes conſolation to the ſinner, hence comfort to the afflicted, and hence the greater encouragement to repentance. *For like as a father pitieth his children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him*. He forgiveth all their iniquities, and healeth all their diſeaſes. He redeemeth their life from deſtruction, and crowneth them with loving kindneſs and tender mercies.* He will clothe

* Pſal. ciii. 3, 4.

them

them with the beſt robe, the robe of Chriſt's righteouſneſs, who died to purchaſe pardon for the penitent. His blood is the ranſom of ſouls: a ranſom ſo valuable as cannot fail to redeem its object. This precious fountain, which was opened in the houſe of David for ſin and for uncleanneſs, is that alone which can waſh off the impurities contracted by habits of vice and immorality; and preſent the humble penitent, without ſpot or blemiſh, before his merciful judge.

By way of application, and as an encouraging exhortation to true repentance, I ſhall here conclude with the words of the prophet Iſaiah. *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon**.

* Chap. lv. 6, 7.

SER-

# SERMON V.

MATTH. xi. 4, 5, 6.

*Jeſus anſwered, and ſaid unto them, Go, and ſhew John again the things which ye do hear and ſee: The blind receive their ſight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raiſed up, and the poor have the goſpel preached unto them. And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.*

THE evidence which God has been pleaſed to afford us, for proving the truth of the religion of Chriſt, is of two ſorts, *viz.* internal and external. The internal proof conſiſts of the divine and holy doctrines, the wiſe and excellent laws, and the eſtimable and uſeful moral precepts contained in the New Teſtament. A religion ſo fitted to enlighten and reform mankind, and to promote the peace, order, and happineſs of the world, muſt appear worthy of God to publiſh; and as the light of nature teaches us, that no falſehood can proceed from him, and nothing but truth and rectitude can be

worthy of him, we may naturally conclude, that whatever unbiaſſed reaſon judges to be worthy of him, muſt be the true religon. And ſince we find no other ſyſtem of doctrines ſo truly rational and ſublime; no ſcheme of morality ſo perfectly pure and inoffenſive; ſo admirably adapted to the neceſſities of life, the circumſtances of our condition, and the general good of ſociety, as that which has been taught by Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles; we have every reaſon that can ariſe from its ſuperior excellence, to acknowledge Chriſtianity as a religion, and its author as a teacher, come from God*.

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* That this evidence of Chriſtianity ſhould be overlooked, or ridiculed by profligate wretches or inconſiderate libertines, is no way ſurpriſing at any time: but that, when it has ſtood the teſt of eighteen hundred years, and is known, and even on all hands allowed, to have eſtabliſhed the nobleſt ſyſtem of theology and morality that ever the world knew, it ſhould ſtill meet with ſerious and ſtudied oppoſition, from men of undoubted talents and learning, who have aſſumed the diſtinguiſhed title of free-thinkers, and pretend to be lovers of truth and of mankind, is to me, I own, aſtoniſhing; and I can account for it no way, but by conſidering it as the moſt dreadful effect of that ſignal infatuation, which God in his juſt judgment ſuffers any of his creatures to fall into for their ſins; that hearing they ſhall hear and not underſtand, and ſeeing they ſhall ſee and not perceive. Abſurd and unaccountable however as it is, it eſtabliſhes the truth of a Chriſtian prophecy; that *in the laſt days there ſhall come ſcoffers, walking after their own ungodly luſts.* 2 Peter iii. 3.

Compare

The other kind of evidence we have, and which the ſchools have choſen to call external evidence, is founded upon the ancient prophecies reſpecting the Meſſiah, and the exact and punctual accompliſhment of thoſe prophecies in the life and character of Jeſus Chriſt; together with the miracles he wrought in confirmation of his divine miſſion, and to prove that in all he did, he acted by the power and authority of God. This is a ſort of evidence capable of convincing all the world; becauſe, when events of ſuch eminent notoriety as the preaching and miracles of our Lord are found to correſpond ſo exactly with the ancient prophecies concerning him, it naturally leads men to believe, that he muſt be the perſon pointed at, by thoſe prophets who uttered them: And when again this perſon gives himſelf out as the object of thoſe prophecies, and performs ſuch a number and ſuch kinds of miracles as our Lord did in ſupport of his pretenſions, this is an argument within the compaſs of every underſtanding, and which whoever can withſtand

Compare Jude 17, 18. and 1 Tim. iv. 1. and thus, while theſe rebels againſt their maker are endeavouring to overthrow religion, they do in fact eſtabliſh it: for if ſuch ſcoffers had not appeared, this prophecy had not been fulfilled. This alſo confirms another prophecy, by making the *foes of Chriſt his footſtool*, to raiſe him higher on his throne, and make his glory more conſpicuous.

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muſt at the ſame time deny the uſe of his natural ſenſes*. This was an evidence well calculated to have convinced the moſt bigotted and obſtinate of his opponents, even the rulers of the Jews; and I have no doubt but they were convinced by our Lord's miracles, that he was a teacher ſent from God, though none of them, except Nicodemus, had the reſolution or the honeſty to own it: for this man, in his conference with our Lord, does not ſay, *I know*, but *we† know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do thoſe miracles which thou doſt, except God be with him.* It were natural here to aſk, why men thus perſuaded of his divine authority, even by the teſtimony of their own ſenſes, ſhould notwithſtanding deny and even perſecute him? This is eaſy to be accounted for.

That the goſpel, at the firſt publication of it, ſhould meet with oppoſition from every quarter, is not to be wondered at. The world, at the time of our Saviour's appearance, conſiſted wholly of Jews and heathens; who, though widely different and oppoſite to each other in matters of religion, and continually at variance among themſelves on that

* It was the glory of Cicero that his enemies were the enemies of the commonwealth: it is the glory of the Chriſtian religion that its enemies are the enemies of common ſenſe. Del. Chriſ. Dut. page 93.

† οἴδαμεν. John iii. 2.

account,

account, would naturally unite againſt the pure and ſpiritual religion of Chriſt.

A religion that oppoſed itſelf to all the paſſions, prejudices, and corruptions of the whole world, could not fail to be ill received and evil ſpoken of, before it was well underſtood. Accordingly we find, that while it became a ſtumbling block to the Jews, the heathens treated it as fooliſhneſs. We may however obſerve, that the Jews did not perſecute our Lord ſo much for his miracles, the nature, the number, and the notoriety of which precluded all denial and diſpute, as on account of his doctrine, which they conſidered as hoſtile to their pride, and oppoſite to that imaginary righteouſneſs of which they boaſted, as well as to their carnal notions of the Meſſiah's temporal reign, and the ſplendid appearance which they imagined he was to make upon earth.

But to return: we may obſerve, our Lord himſelf lays great ſtreſs upon this external evidence of his miſſion, as in many paſſages of the goſpel, ſo eſpecially in the words of our text: which we ſhall now conſider more particularly.

We are told in the verſes preceding our text, that John the baptiſt having heard in his priſon the fame of Jeſus, and being by reaſon of his confinement unable to ſee or to hear him in perſon, ſent two of his

his diſciples to aſk him this queſtion: *Art thou he that ſhould come, or do we look for another?* Now we are not to conſider this enquiry, as proceeding from ignorance in the baptiſt; and far leſs as a matter of trifling or idle curioſity: John knew perfectly well that the Meſſiah was come. He himſelf was expreſsly commanded to declare it publicly; he had baptiſed him in the river Jordan; had ſeen the Holy Ghoſt, deſcending on him in a bodily ſhape; he had heard the heavenly voice, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed;* and himſelf had, by the inſpiration of the ſame ſpirit, pointed him out, as *the Lamb of God that taketh away the ſins of the world.* He could not therefore have any doubt in his own mind whether Chriſt was come. But John was now in priſon, where he had been confined at the inſtigation of a bad woman, with whoſe vindictive ſpirit he was well acquainted; conſequently he might naturally conclude that his own public miniſtry was now at an end, and probably his death at no great diſtance. For this reaſon he wiſhed, as every faithful paſtor would, to leave his diſciples in better hands than his own. He therefore ſelected two of their number, who ſhould be witneſſes to the reſt, of Jeſus's doctrine and miracles. By this he undoubtedly meant, to remove any doubt or ſcru-

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ple that might remain in the minds of his diſciples; for in his own there could be none. Art thou he that ſhould come? Art thou he whom the prophets have given us reaſon to expect? Art thou the explainer and the fulfiller of the law? Art thou the reſtorer of Iſrael, the Saviour of the world? For all theſe characters muſt unite in the perſon of him that ſhould come.

The method of our Lord's anſwer deſerves a particular conſideration. Had he anſwered immediately in the affirmative, his enemies might have taken advantage of his words, and reproached him with bearing witneſs of himſelf, which in all caſes is ſuppoſed to weaken the force of the teſtimony*: He might indeed have anſwered, I am he, on whom John ſaw the Holy Ghoſt deſcending, after my baptiſm in Jordan; and this would have ſufficiently ſatisfied John, if he had needed ſatisfaction. But as I have already obſerved, John was not the perſon to be ſatisfied, but his diſciples; thoſe two in particular who came to make the enquiry; and that in ſuch a manner, as ſhould ſatisfy not only them, but ſuch as ought to ſatisfy all, who ſhould at any future time be equally inquiſitive. *Go*, ſays he, *and ſhow John again the things which ye do hear and ſee.* By examin-

* John v. 34.

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ing ſome of the particulars which our Lord here enumerates, we ſhall ſee how exactly they correſpond with the ſacred oracles of the ancient prophets, that thus the Meſſiah ſhould be known, and his divine miſſion and authority proved. For inſtance, he tells theſe meſſengers of John that the blind receive their ſight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear. With this agrees the 146th Pſalm, 8th ver. *The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind.* And Iſaiah, ſpeaking of the flouriſhing of Chriſt's kingdom, ſays, *Then the eyes of the blind ſhall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unſtopped*, chap. xxxv. 5. and again, *In that day ſhall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind ſhall ſee out of obſcurity and out of darkneſs*, chap. xxix. 18. *Then ſhall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb ſhall ſing*, chap. xxxv. 6.

The cleanſing of lepers was alſo foretold by the prophet Joel, chap. iii. 21. *For I will cleanſe their blood, that I have not cleanſed, for the Lord dwelleth in Zion.*

As another proof of his being the Meſſiah, or he that ſhould come, Jeſus bids theſe two diſciples tell John that the dead were raiſed. This was an inſtance of his power, which none could deny to be from heaven; for all the world muſt allow, that

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no power but that of God can reſtore a dead body to life. And this too had been expreſsly mentioned by the prophets, as an unequivocal and indiſputable mark of the Meſſiah's kingdom; particularly in that well known paſſage of Iſaiah, xxvi. 19. where the prophet, ſpeaking in the character of the Meſſiah, ſays, *Thy dead men ſhall live; together with my dead body ſhall they ariſe: awake and ſing, ye that dwell in duſt, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth ſhall caſt out the dead.* And again, 21. *The earth alſo ſhall diſcloſe her blood, and ſhall no more cover her ſlain.* And now, to ſum up the evidence of his being the true Meſſiah, or he that ſhould come, he bids them tell John, that the poor have the goſpel preached to them. This was a remarkable difference in his manner of preaching, from that of the Jewiſh doctors of his time, as John could not but know. For the Scribes were proud and mercenary teachers, inſtructing only the rich, and that not without exorbitant fees; and deſpiſing the common people, whom they diſtinguiſhed by the odious appellation of people of the earth; ſupporting their impudence with a fooliſh proverb of their own invention, which ſays that * "The Spirit reſteth only upon the rich man." But Chriſt, who came into

* Humph. in Loc.

the world for the ſalvation of all its inhabitants, began his preaching among the loweſt orders of the people, and his firſt converts and choſen miniſters were poor and illiterate fiſhermen. Thus he himſelf expounds the prophecy of Iſaiah*, in that memorable text from which he choſe to ſpeak in Luke iv. 18. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, becauſe he hath anointed me to preach the goſpel to the poor*, &c.

The word goſpel in the original † ſignifies good news, or, as the ſcripture expreſſes it, glad tidings: and ſurely the tidings of ſalvation, which is the ſum and ſubſtance of this divine revelation, is the beſt news that ever man received: and therefore our Saviour adds, *Bleſſed is he whoſoever is not offended in me;* as if he had ſaid, though you ſee I have ſet out in my miniſtry, in a different way from the Scribes and Jewiſh teachers, let not the meanneſs of my appearance in the world, or the humble ſtation of my followers, be a motive with any one for taking offence at my doctrine, or diſcrediting my miſſion: for I tell you, God will bleſs with eternal life, as many as ſhall be found among the number of my faithful followers.

Thus you ſee the force and energy of our Lord's anſwer to the meſſage of John. We muſt ſuppoſe, that John was well acquainted with all

* Chap. lxi. 1. † Ευαγγέλιον.

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the prophecies reſpecting the Meſſiah; by comparing which with the facts his diſciples had ſeen, and were deſired to communicate to him, an opportunity was given him, of proving that Jeſus was the Chriſt, in a manner more convincing to them than a direct affirmative could have been. And this I think muſt have been our Saviour's intention, in the manner of his reply: for as I have already obſerved, he muſt have known, that John in his own mind had no doubt upon the ſubject.

From what has been ſaid, we may obſerve on what ſort of evidence Chriſtianity ſtands. Its own internal purity gives it the faireſt title to a candid hearing, and the external evidence by which its divine origin is proved, is the moſt powerful motive to its univerſal and complete acceptance. The miracles wrought by our Saviour ſo frequently, ſo publicly, and in the preſence of ſuch unbelievers, and even of enemies, muſt carry conviction to every mind, who would compare the ancient prophecies with the events, and ſubmit to the evidence of common ſenſe and perception. But even theſe could not conquer prejudice and perverſe obſtinacy.

*Bleſſed*, ſays our Lord, *are they who are not offended;* which plainly intimates, that many will be offended ſtill. Religion will continue to be

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ſpoken againſt, and the ſtone which is become the head of the corner, will meet with builders to reject it, and remain a ſtone of ſtumbling and a rock of offence to the unbelieving and diſobedient.

But this, ſo far from unſettling our faith, ſhould rather confirm it; for even in this particular, the prophecies are fulfilled in Jeſus: for that he ſhould be deſpiſed and rejected of men was as explicitly foretold of him, as any other circumſtance concerning him, and no one could have proved himſelf to be the Meſſiah, to whom this proof had been wanting. Let not therefore the cavillings of ſophiſtry, nor the inſinuations of wickedneſs, tempt us to depart from the rock of our ſalvation; but let us * *with purpoſe of heart cleave unto the Lord*, and ſtrenuouſly adhere to that holy faith which he hath taught us; and let our zeal for Jeſus Chriſt and his religion be ſeen, in ſuch a prudent, wiſe, and inoffenſive conduct, as the goſpel requires, and which, while it ſerves to put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men, will through divine grace be the happy inſtrument of recommending us to that bleſſedneſs, which belongs to them who are not offended in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord.

* Acts ix. 23.

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# SERMON VI.

LUKE xxii. 62.

*And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

IN the former part of this chapter, we have an account of a converſation which our Lord had with his diſciples, wherein he tells them that ſatan had deſired permiſſion to ſift them like wheat; which in plain language is as much as to ſay, to ſift or try them with ſome very ſtrong and prevailing temptation; ſomething that was likely to ſtagger their faith, and draw them off from their allegiance to Chriſt. The figure there made uſe of is certainly a very proper one to repreſent the thing meant by it: The purpoſe of ſifting corn is to ſeparate it from the chaff and other droſs that may be mixed with it, and force every other kind of ſubſtance from the pure grain. The ſame may be ſaid of temptations: they evidently ſeparate and diſtinguiſh a true and lively faith, from that which is only falſe and pretended. On this paſſage we may obſerve, that if it was the deſire of ſatan to be allowed

allowed to tempt the apoſtles, he was for this time gratified in his requeſt; and ſo far did he ſucceed, that when the hour of trial came, and they ſaw their Lord was actually apprehended, they all forſook him and fled; nay, the apoſtle named in our text was ſo far overcome by the temptation, as three times to deny poſitively that he knew him. That ſatan is ſometimes permitted to tempt the ſervants of God, appears to be evident, from many paſſages of ſcripture. It was plainly the caſe with Job, and eminently ſo with Peter; who, though ſo zealous in his love and fidelity to his maſter, as to declare at the 33d verſe, that he was ready to go with him to priſon, and even to death, yet no ſooner was he charged with being one of his followers, but he denied even the knowledge of his perſon. Our Lord had foretold him at the 34th verſe, that the cock ſhould not crow that day before he had thrice repeated this denial; and accordingly ſo it happened, as we find from the 54th and following verſes, which run thus. *Then took they him* (Jeſus) *and led him, and brought him into the high prieſt's houſe, and Peter followed afar off.* 55 *And when they had kindled a fire in the midſt of the hall, and were ſet down together, Peter ſat down among them.* 56 *But a certain maid beheld him as he ſat by the fire, and earneſtly looked upon him, and ſaid, This man*

*was*

*was alſo with him.* 57 *And he denied him, ſaying, Woman, I know him not.* 58 *And after a little while another ſaw him, and ſaid, Thou art alſo of them. And he ſaid, Man, I am not.* 59 *And about the ſpace of one hour after, another confidently affirmed, ſaying, Of a truth this fellow was alſo with him, for he is a Galilean.* 60 *And Peter ſaid, Man, I know not what thou ſayeſt. And immediately while he yet ſpake the cock crew.* 61 *And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he ſaid unto him, Before the cock crow thou ſhalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly.*

That a man ſhould deny his Lord upon any occaſion, will not be wondered at in this age of licentiouſneſs, wherein we are accuſtomed to hear the profane blaſphemies of the ignorant, and to read thoſe of the learned; much leſs could we be ſurpriſed to ſee ſuch a defection, if the adherence to the cauſe of God were to be attended with any pain or ſuffering to the party: But that an apoſtle, who had been with our Lord from the beginning of his miniſtry, had heard his diſcourſes, ſeen his miracles, and beheld his glory in the mount of transfiguration, nay, who had himſelf preached the goſpel, and even wrought miracles in his name: that he ſhould fall off, who was the very cephas,

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the rock upon which Chriſt had declared that his church was to be founded; and who had ſo lately declared, that he was ready not only to ſuffer, but even to die with him; this, I ſay, requires to be differently accounted for: this was no common defection; not the oppoſition of an open enemy, nor the treachery of a pretended friend; it was no ſly and ſubtle foe, who had inſinuated himſelf into favour in order to betray him that was guilty of it: but that zealous diſciple, that gallant ſoldier of Chriſt, who, but a little while before, drew his ſword in defence of his maſter's perſon, and ſtruck off Malchus's ear for daring to approach him rudely. This matter duly conſidered will ſuggeſt ſome uſeful reflections. Let us take them as they occur, and endeavour to improve them as we go.

You will perhaps wonder to hear me ſay, but I believe it to be literally true, that Peter fell a victim to the too common failing of good men: I mean a confidence in their own ſtrength to withſtand temptation. This is an error the more fatal, as it proceeds from having experienced their own virtue upon former occaſions; which gives a fair preſumption in their favour on any particular emergency; eſpecially if in the inſtance alluded to, the temptation is leſs likely to ſhake their conſtancy

ſtancy or corrupt their integrity, than thoſe they have already withſtood: in ſuch a caſe, I ſay, an honeſt man is but too liable to preſumption: ſuch an one will naturally be inclined to think thus with himſelf. Surely I have conquered in a conflict more arduous than the preſent is likely to prove, I have reſiſted a more alluring invitation than this offers, or braved a greater danger than it threatens; therefore here is nothing to alarm a virtue, which I know by ſuch repeated experience to be proof againſt ſo much greater trials. This was exactly the caſe of Peter. When an armed multitude came to ſeize his maſter, he was ready to have ſpilt his blood in his defence; nay and had actually begun the combat, that might have ended in ſuch an event. And yet behold the fatal change! Behold this hero, in an hour, become the moſt ſhameful coward, and alarmed at the voice of a maid!

But while we condemn his conduct in this inſtance, let us remember that we ourſelves are but men, as frail and as fallible as he; and therefore cannot be ſure, that we ſhould have acted better, had we been in his place. Peter was now in the high prieſt's houſe, where our Lord was then a priſoner. He had ſeen him betrayed and ſeized: he himſelf had been prevented from attempting to de-

fend him; he ſaw him now given up to the power of his enemies, who, no doubt, as is commonly the caſe with thoſe who guard a priſoner, were buſy in foretelling what his fate would be. In the courſe of ſuch a converſation, they who had prejudged the maſter, would hardly fail to condemn his adherents, as partaking of his ſuppoſed crime. In theſe circumſtances Peter could ſee no hope of giving any aſſiſtance to his Lord, by owning him as ſuch, but certain deſtruction to himſelf in caſe he had made ſuch a confeſſion.

Now I do not pretend to juſtify the conduct of Peter upon this occaſion: I only ſay that we who are ſo ready to condemn him unheard, might not in his ſituation perhaps have acted much better.

To hold faſt the profeſſion of our religion without wavering, at all times and on every occaſion, requires ſomething more than human prudence or human fortitude. It is the effect of divine grace, and that alone can enable us to do it. This ſhould make us humble in our opinions of ourſelves, and modeſt in cenſuring the conduct of others.

2dly, We are not likely indeed to be ever in the caſe of Peter when he denied his Lord: but how apt are we to forget him upon far leſs trying occaſions! I do not ſay that we formally diſown the name of Chriſt, or renounce the hope of that ſalvation he hath purchaſed: but how often do

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we ſeem, as if we for a time ſuſpended our conviction of the terms upon which it is offered to us! How is it poſſible that men could indulge themſelves in the crimes we ſee them commit, if they were at the time convinced that the very end of Chriſt's giving himſelf for us, was that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works? I ſay it is impoſſible, that under the natural influence of ſuch a perſuaſion men could indulge themſelves in ſin; and their doing ſo muſt be owing to the weakneſs or ſuſpenſion of their faith; which, were it ſtedfaſt and uniform, would never admit of ſuch a conduct, as the ſcripture moſt juſtly terms denying the Lord in their works.

3dly, We may obſerve from ſeveral paſſages of St. Peter's life, that he was a man of a warm and impetuous temper; a failing not uncommonly met with in characters of great integrity: and when he had once denied his Lord, the credit of his own veracity induced him to repeat the fault, nay, and to aggravate the ſin by making uſe of ſuch aſſeverations as are in no caſe to be juſtified: for we are told in the parallel paſſage of St. Matthew and St. Mark's goſpels, that *he began to curſe and to ſwear, ſaying, I know not this man of whom ye ſpeak**.

* Matt. xxvi. 74. Mark. xiv. 71.

And

And to how many evils have thoſe two given birth, even among thoſe who have otherwiſe been no bad men, I mean an impetuoſity of temper, joined to a falſe notion of honour! What quarrels, animoſities, and even murders, have ariſen from no better cauſe, than a word ſpoken in the heat of paſſion, which the miſtaken honour of the ſpeaker would not ſuffer him to retract, till like Peter he has wept in ſecret for the conſequences of his own folly and wickedneſs! Nay, to ſuch a height has this extravagant frenzy ariſen in our day, that we have ceaſed to wonder, when we hear that a man has, in one of thoſe fits of inſanity, murdered the friend of his boſom, and for whoſe preſervation he would have hazarded his own life but a few moments before!

Such are the diſmal effects of ungoverned paſſions and licentious manners, and too great a conformity to the cuſtoms and opinions of this world. We ought therefore to learn from this, to curb our paſſions in their firſt ſallies; ſince, if ſtrengthened by indulgence, we know not how far they may carry us, or where they may ſtop.

4thly, Let us be thankful to Almighty God, for the many reaſons he has been pleaſed to give us, for the truth of the goſpel hiſtory; among which certainly one is, the candor with which the hiſtorians have

have related the faults they and their brethren committed, and the frailties to which they were liable. It is the buſineſs of impoſture always to magnify itſelf. When therefore we ſee the Evangeliſts candidly relating ſuch paſſages as the denial of St. Peter, the obſtinate unbelief of St. Thomas, and others, ſetting forth their own folly, ignorance, and want of faith, we may, nay, we ought to conclude, that they can have no intention to impoſe upon us, and therefore to believe them.

5thly, Let us beware of putting too great a confidence in our own ſtrength in matters of faith. We ſee how fatal ſuch a confidence was in the caſe before us. Peter had declared that ſooner than deny his Lord, he would die; and in this declaration I dare ſay he was as ſincere as we can be in any pious reſolution we make; but he forgot the neceſſity of ſuperior ſtrength, to ſupport him in the hour of temptation. His failure therefore ſhould convey to us this leſſon of wiſdom, not to confide in ourſelves, but in God, whoſe all-powerful grace alone is able to keep us from falling, and who hath promiſed not to fail thoſe who put their truſt in him.

Laſtly, From the whole of this memorable tranſaction, we may gather this comfortable, this bleſſed aſſurance, that ſincere and unfeigned repentance

ſhall

ſhall certainly find a gracious acceptance, and the truly penitent is ſure of pardon.

We are told in the verſe preceding the text, that the Lord, as ſoon as the cock had crowed, turned and looked upon Peter. O what a look was there! How eaſily with that look might he have laid the offender dead at his feet! But no; **The Son of man came, not to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them.* The bleſſed Redeemer of ſouls, ever mild and merciful, gentle and eaſy to be entreated, looked on Peter. It was the look of kind and tender remonſtrance, of pity for the temporary defection of a diſciple ſo faithful and zealous, as he knew him to be on all occaſions, ſave the moment of this unhappy lapſe. It was the look of godlike mercy and forgiveneſs to a penitent ſervant, now made ſenſible by ſad experience of his own weakneſs and preſumption. It was a look—But why ſhould I attempt to deſcribe what language is unable to expreſs? That ſilent but impreſſive glance pierced the ſoul of Peter, and ſent him aſhamed from the preſence of his divine maſter, to ſorrow, repentance, and the bitterneſs of tears.

But we are not to imagine that Peter wept from fear of puniſhment, ſuch as our Lord might in

* Luke ix. 57.

ſtrict

ſtrict juſtice have inflicted on him; for the ſubſequent part of his hiſtory proves clearly, that he muſt have been conſcious of his divine maſter's forgiveneſs, even while his tears were flowing: We may therefore fairly conclude, that he wept from real ſorrow, for having, even for a moment, renounced his allegiance to that Lord, who at the inſtant was ſuffering, to atone for the very oaths and blaſphemies with which he had denied him.

Brethren*, he who then looked on Peter, looks now on you, on me, on all mankind. His all-ſeeing eye reſts not on the ſurface, but penetrates the moſt ſecret receſſes of the heart; and if guile or hypocriſy dwell there, we muſt not think they will eſcape the notice of him, before whom all things are naked and open: but if our repentance like Peter's be ſincere, our acceptance will like his be certain, our pardon like his complete.

Let us then devoutly beſeech Almighty God (as our excellent church has taught us) to grant us true repentance and his holy ſpirit, which are the ſure and certain means of coming at laſt to his eternal joy: To which do thou, of thine infinite mercy, lead and conduct us, O God of our ſalvation, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

* Young.

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# SERMON VII.

JOEL ii. 12, 13.

*Therefore alſo now, ſaith the Lord, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with faſting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: For he is gracious and merciful, ſlow to anger, and of great kindneſs, and repenteth him of the evil.*

IN the foregoing part of this prophecy, we find the judgments of God denounced againſt his people for their ſins. The effects of divine wrath had indeed taken place among them by the grievous famine of which the prophet complains in the firſt chapter; for the locuſt, and the palmer worm, and the canker worm, and the caterpillar, are there deſcribed, as having devoured the fruits of the earth, ſo that there was no ſuſtenance left for man or beaſt. Yet in this heavy calamity, they are called to repentance in the words of the text. *Turn ye even to me*, &c. *and rend*, &c.

It

It was a cuſtom long eſtabliſhed among the Jews and other eaſtern nations, upon hearing any tidings of a grievous and calamitous nature, eſpecially if it was ſudden and unexpected, to tear off, and rent their upper, which was generally the moſt ornamental garment: and the ſign of extraordinary penitence and humiliation, was to put on ſackcloth in its room. But theſe external ſigns of mourning and repentance had been ſo abuſed, and ſo often made to cover guile and hypocriſy, as to be no longer held in eſtimation in the ſight of God. *Turn ye unto me with all your heart:* as if he had ſaid, the appearance of repentance which ye put on, may ſeem very proper expreſſions of the inward contrition which becomes you; but if you would have them produce any benefit to yourſelves, if ye mean to make them inſtrumental to your acceptance with me, they muſt be accompanied with inward ſincerity; for without this they are of no value at all.

Rent your hearts therefore; be truly ſorry for your ſins, and ſeriouſly and heartily forſake them; and then, your faſting and weeping and mourning may be a reaſonable and an acceptable ſervice; but until the heart is converted, no advantage of any kind can be expected from thoſe external ſervices.

Nothing is ſo frequently and earneſtly inculcated in ſcripture as repentance; nothing more encouraged than the performance of it; and nothing more ſeverely reproved and threatened than the neglect of it. The better therefore to underſtand our duty in this caſe, we ſhall do well to conſider two things.

I. The nature of true repentance. And,

II. The encouragement given to the performance of it.

I. Repentance, in the general acceptation of the word, is that compunction or ſorrow which one feels for having acted wrong, or for having done ſomething which ought not to have been done. Thus it is ſaid of Judas, that when he ſaw that Chriſt was condemned to death, he repented of having betrayed him.

When a malefactor is likely to ſuffer for his crimes, he no doubt reflects upon his conduct with regret; and the more heinous his crimes, and the more ſevere the puniſhment he expects, the greater will be his ſorrow for having, by committing ſuch, brought himſelf into that diſtreſſing condition. But this kind of repentance, like that of Judas, ariſes from the fear of puniſhment, and is perfectly conſiſtent with the ſame wicked principles that firſt induced him to perpetrate the

crimes

crimes which have brought him to it. A man under the impreſſion of this ſorrow, let him but eſcape from the hands of juſtice, and be again let looſe upon the world, and it is ten to one he will be only the more hardened for his impunity, and more vicious and corrupt than ever. This the ſchools have therefore diſtinguiſhed under the name of legal repentance: an act of conſtraint, proceeding from a principle of terror. The man is ſorry for his crimes, becauſe they have expoſed him to puniſhment, but not becauſe he has offended God by them: but this is ſo far from being the kind of repentance to which we are exhorted in the word of God, that we may fairly ſuppoſe, the very devils themſelves are actuated by this, whenever they reflect upon their preſent hopeleſs condition, compared to the glorious eſtate from which they fell.

But the repentance to which we are called in ſcripture, is a ſaving grace wrought in the heart by the ſpirit of God, whereby a ſinner is made to ſee the malignity of ſin, as it is impure and abominable in the ſight of his Creator; as an act of rebellion againſt the Almighty Sovereign of the univerſe, and of ingratitude to the beſt and moſt generous benefactor. This rouſes his indignation againſt it, humbles him before God for it, and ſtimulates his

his honeſt endeavours to forſake it: and this not ſo much from fear of the puniſhment due to his offences, as from humble gratitude and love to God, who by them is offended, and from ſhame and contrition, that by ſin he has offended ſuch a good and kind, ſuch a merciful and indulgent Creator, diſhonoured his name, violated his law, and made his own ſoul baſe and polluted in the ſight of God. The ſoul under this impreſſion muſt of courſe determine to forſake all ſin as ſuch, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. This is that godly ſorrow deſcribed by St. Paul, which worketh repentance not to be repented of. This reſembles the penitence of Peter, when he wept for having in the evil hour of temptation denied his Lord.

This is that repentance which God will accept, and which he has promiſed to reward with everlaſting life. And moſt reaſonable and juſt it ſhould be ſo: for this godly ſorrow for ſin muſt naturally produce a thorough hatred for it, and a firm and ſtedfaſt reſolution to forſake it; the effects of which muſt be a ſincere obedience of all God's commandments, and that patient continuance in well-doing, that ſeeking for glory and honour and immortality, to which the promiſe of eternal life is annexed: which leads me to the ſecond thing I propoſed to

conſider, your

your conſideration from the words of the text, *viz.*

II. The encouragement given to repentance in the word of God.

*Turn unto the Lord*, ſays our text, *for he is gracious and merciful, ſlow to anger, and of great kindneſs, and repenteth him of the evil.* The merciful loving kindneſs of God to his creatures needs no other proof, than that which every hour brings to the view of any attentive obſerver. Our life and breath, and all our motions, are of him. Every moment of our exiſtence is in his hands, and without him there is nothing that we can do. Are we not ſurrounded by his preſence, and guarded by his providence continually? And ſurely when we conſider all this, and how often by our ſins we offend him, we muſt allow that it is of his infinite mercy and goodneſs, thus to ſpare and preſerve us, calling us daily to repentance, and graciouſly waiting to ſhow mercy to us, whenever we return to him and our duty.

The many calls of grace, the many opportunities which he affords us, of knowing his will and performing our duty, notwithſtanding our unteachable ignorance in the one, and our frequent tranſgreſſions of the other, are plain and ſtriking proofs, that *he is ſlow to anger and of great kindneſs:* and the repetition of theſe mercies, notwithſtanding our

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frequent neglect of them, and of his threatened diſpleaſure, evidently ſhow that he repenteth him of the evil. This laſt expreſſion, however, ſeems to require ſome explanation.

The ſacred writers frequently repreſent God as moved with repentance or regret, for having done or reſolved upon certain things, or for having ſuffered them to come to paſs: Thus he is ſaid to repent of having made man*, and again of having made Saul king over Iſrael†; becauſe in the former caſe, the wickedneſs of mankind was become ſo great, and becauſe Saul had, by diſobedience to the divine command, forfeited the only title by which the crown of Iſrael could be held. There are alſo ſeveral other paſſages, in which the ſame expreſſion is uſed: but this is not to be underſtood as if God really had conceived any regret or compunction, for any thing that he had done wrong, or that he repents of a falſe ſtep he had made, as a man does when he perceives that he has committed an error: the infinite perfection of his divine nature muſt ſet him far from the poſſibility of repentance in this ſenſe of the word: But he ſometimes changes his conduct towards thoſe who have ſhown themſelves unfaithful to him, and conſequently unfit for the continuance of his favour; and after having treated

* Gen. vi. 6. † 1 Sam. xv. 2.

them

them with diſtinguiſhed mercy, corrects them with proportional ſeverity, as if he had repented of what he had formerly done in their favour. But in my text God is ſaid to repent of the evil; that evil he was about to inflict. This phraſe is uſed, when, moved with compaſſion towards ſinners, or intreated by their prayers, he remits the puniſhment of their ſins, or ſuſpends the execution of the judgments which he had threatened to inflict. Thus in Deut. xxxii. 35. he is ſaid to repent himſelf for his ſervants, when the meaning, as the context ſhows, is evidently that he will have mercy on them, and turn his hand from puniſhing them, when they ceaſe to truſt in any other than him for deliverance. Thus again in Pſalm cvi. 45. he is ſaid to have repented according to the multitude of his mercies. And again in Pſalm cxxxv. 14. *The Lord will judge his people, and he will repent himſelf concerning his ſervants.* With ſundry other texts to the ſame purpoſe. From all which we are to learn only the merciful placability of God, and that he is at all times diſpoſed to have mercy upon his creatures, if they will return from their evil courſes and amend their lives. But without repentance we have no promiſe of mercy, and without mercy we muſt be loſt for ever.

Here then is our encouragement, that if we ſincerely

cerely repent, we ſhall aſſuredly meet with mercy and pardon, as the Lord has declared by the mouth of his prophet; by whom he calls, in the moſt affectionate manner, all ſinners to repentance; aſſuring them that he has no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner, but rather that all ſhould repent and live; which ſhows that immortal life is annexed to repentance, and that none but the impenitent ſhall finally ſuffer for their ſins. And our bleſſed Redeemer, when expounding the ſcriptures to the two diſciples in the way to Emmaus, tells them it behoved Chriſt to ſuffer and to riſe from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remiſſion of ſins ſhould be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jeruſalem.

Could farther proof be neceſſary to aſſure us of pardon upon repentance, than ſuch clear and repeated promiſes of ſcripture to confirm it? Yet even more than this we have, to encourage us in turning to God with all our heart, and humbling ourſelves before him with ſincere repentance. We have the cheering experience of his dealing with penitent ſinners, recorded in the ſacred oracles of truth; of which I ſhall only take notice of a few, to illuſtrate this part of my ſubject.

You all remember the ſtory of David, in the caſe of Uriah the Hittite. When the prophet Nathan reproved

reproved him for the complicated crime of adultery and murder; his parable and its application ſtruck David to the heart, and made him cry out, as in an ecſtacy of ſorrow and repentance, *I have ſinned againſt the Lord.* On ſuch an occaſion, we ſhould perhaps have been apt to conclude, that, according to the ſentence he had inadvertently pronounced upon the caſe, David ought to have ſuffered death, or ſome other grievous puniſhment: but the ſearcher of hearts ſaw the ſincerity of David's repentance, and immediately authoriſed the prophet to pronounce his pardon.

Another inſtance of this kind was that of Ahab, who, through the wicked counſel and infamous contrivance of Jezebel his wife, had been guilty of murdering Naboth, diſpoſſeſſing him, and diſinheriting his family of their little vineyard; and Elijah was ſent expreſsly to reprove and threaten deſtruction to him and his family: yet upon his humble and ſincere repentance, God ſo far changed the ſentence of ſeverity, that he deferred the execution of it during all the life of Ahab.

Thus we ſee how, both by the divine promiſes, and the dealings of divine providence with men, we are encouraged to repentance by the aſſurance of pardon. Let but our ſincerity be as ſincere as was that of David and Ahab, and let us not

doubt but our acceptance will be equal to theirs. God is not ſubject as we are to change. He is the ſame yeſterday, to-day, and for ever: always ready to hear the prayers of the truly penitent, and beſtow on them the bleſſings of his kingdom; where they ſhall live and reign with him for ever and ever. To which ſupreme felicity may God of his infinite mercy grant us admiſſion, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

# SERMON VIII.

**Preached on Chriſtmas day.**

ISAIAH xlix. 13.

*Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth, and break forth into ſinging, O mountains; for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.*

ON the preſent joyful occaſion I may be allowed to uſe the language of our bleſſed Lord on another. **This day is this ſcripture fulfilled in your ears.*

The preſent ſolemnity calls upon us to commemorate the birth of our Saviour; and the piety of our excellent church hath provided a ſervice for the occaſion, well ſuited to impreſs upon our minds the ſentiments moſt ſuitable to the celebration of ſo great an event. In the firſt † leſſon, he is ſet forth by the prophet, in all the wonderful power of wiſdom and council, in all the might and

* Luke iv. 21. † Iſaiah ix. 6.

majeſty

majeſty of an univerſal governor, and all the glory of God, the everlaſting Father; with all the mild benignity, and all the ſweet condeſcenſion of the prince of peace. Thus was the character of the bleſſed Redeemer of mankind foretold by the mouth of his holy prophet, in language ſo clear, and a ſtyle ſo majeſtic, that nothing but the glory of the ſubject exceeds the ſublimity of the deſcription. Nor is it poſſible to wiſh for a more full and literal accompliſhment of any thing foretold, than the prophecy in the firſt leſſon for this day receives, from the hiſtory recorded in the * ſecond, † the epiſtle, and ‡ goſpel, and other ſervice appointed for this holy ſeaſon.

The foreknowledge of the glorious privileges that were to be the inheritance of God's people under the goſpel diſpenſation, makes the prophet in a divine ecſtacy call upon the whole creation, to teſtify a becoming gratitude for ſo great a redemption: *Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth, and break forth into ſinging, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.* But if the proſpect of this mercy and comfort was ſuch great cauſe of joy to the prophet, while yet it was future and diſtant, and lay as it were unborn in the womb of time; if he could

* Luke ii. † Heb. i. ‡ John i.

rejoice

rejoice in the proſpect, that a child ſhould at ſome diſtant period be born, but not till himſelf had long ceaſed to be an inhabitant of the world; how much more cauſe of rejoicing have we, to whom this ſtupendous inſtance of the divine goodneſs is no longer a ſubject of hope or expectation, but as a fact already paſt; a fact recorded in ſeveral concurring hiſtories, all dictated by the ſpirit of truth, atteſted by wonderful and uncommon appearances in heaven, by the united chorus of angels celebrating his glorious nativity, and by the voice of God himſelf, audibly declaring, * *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleaſed!*

From the words before us three things are offered to our conſideration.

I. That the birth of Chriſt is matter of rejoicing to all the creation.

II. What ſort of joy ſhould be felt and expreſſed on the commemoration of this great event. And,

III. The manner in which the pleaſure we feel on this joyful occaſion ought to affect our conduct.

Firſt then, that the birth of Chriſt is matter of great rejoicing to all the creation, we cannot doubt, if we conſider with what pleaſure the redemption

* Matt. iii. 17.

purchaſed

purchaſed by him is mentioned by all parts of the creation to whom it was revealed.

The firſt account we have of ſuch a diſcovery being made, was to our firſt parents. To them, ſoon after they had tranſgreſſed, he was expreſsly promiſed, as the perſon who ſhould bruiſe the head of their ſeducer; who ſhould humble the ſhort-lived triumph he had obtained over human weakneſs to the duſt, who ſhould defeat the efforts of his malice and cunning, and turn all his devices againſt himſelf.

In the loſt condition of our firſt parents after the fall, certainly nothing could make life even tolerable, but the aſſurance that God had given them, to raiſe them from that depth of miſery into which they had plunged themſelves; and though the promiſe is conveyed in terms which to us at this diſtance of time appear not very clear and explicit, yet it undoubtedly ſerved to aſſure them, that God intended in ſome way or other, conſiſtent with his own wiſdom and the honour of his government, to reſtore the immortality they had forfeited by the fall. But with this aſſurance we find them rejoicing on the birth of Cain, ſaying, I have gotten a man from the Lord; and again on that of Seth, as having recovered the ſeed which had been loſt in the death of Abel.

To

To them therefore the promiſe was certainly not only matter of joy in itſelf, but the foundation of every degree of pleaſure they felt from any other cauſe. For with what comfort or ſatisfaction could they ſee their offspring born, new creatures ſtart into being, if they had no proſpect for them, but that of divine wrath and the miſery that muſt follow? It is plain therefore, that the foundation and ſubject of their rejoicing could be no other than that ſeed of the woman, which, from the moment of his being promiſed, they conſidered as the reſtorer of their nature, the perſon by whoſe means they were to recover the immortality they had loſt, and retrieve the divine favour which they had forfeited.

II. To the patriarchs and prophets who ſucceeded them, he certainly was revealed under the ſame character, as we may ſee by many paſſages of their writings. Thus Job plainly aſſerts the reſurrection of his body by the power of the promiſed Redeemer, in that memorable paſſage in the xixth chap. 25, 26, 27. *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he ſhall ſtand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my ſkin, worms deſtroy this body, yet in my fleſh ſhall I ſee God: Whom I ſhall ſee for myſelf, and mine eyes ſhall behold, and not another, though my reins be conſumed within me.*

It

It is plain from this paſſage that Job looked for the reſtoration of his nature, after death ſhould have put an end to his preſent exiſtence; and that under the joyful aſſurance of ſuch a proſpect, his faith was able to bear up againſt all the cruelty of pretended friends, the ſudden loſs of his children, and decay of his fortune, the excruciating pains of a loathſome and lingering diſeaſe, and in ſhort all the evils that the malice of the very devil let looſe could bring upon his mind, body, and eſtate.

To Abraham and David, the promiſe was renewed, expreſsly confining its accompliſhment to their reſpective families. The joy of the latter on this ſubject, makes no inconſiderable part of thoſe beautiful Odes or Pſalms which go by his name, **The King* (ſays he) *ſhall rejoice in thy ſtrength, O Lord: exceeding glad ſhall he be of thy ſalvation. Thou haſt given him his hearts deſire, and haſt not withheld the requeſt of his lips. He aſked life of thee, and thou gaveſt him a long life: even for ever and ever.* Again†, *My ſeed ſhall ſerve him: they ſhall be counted unto the Lord for a generation. They ſhall come, and the heavens ſhall declare his righteouſneſs: unto a people that ſhall be born whom the Lord hath made.* In ſhort the whole book of Pſalms is in-

* Pſal. xxi. 1, 2. 4. † Pſal. xxii. 31, 32.

terſperſed

terſperſed with ſuch expreſſions, as teſtify the triumphs of a heart devoted to God, in the proſpect of this great and ſignal mercy to mankind.

The prophets who were ſubſequent to David, had revelations of the Meſſiah, in terms more and more explicit; and the tranſports in which they mention the glories of his kingdom, bear a direct proportion to the clearneſs of the informations they had of his coming.

Nor was the joy excited by the knowledge of this wonderful event, at all confined to thoſe patriarchs and prophets, to whom it was diſcovered in terms by expreſs revelation. The very * heathens, whoſe knowledge of God and his diſpenſations conſiſted only in ſome few remains of the ancient tradition (and thoſe mixed with fable and abſurdity), had found out even by this glimmering light, the neceſſity of a redemption: and ſufficiently teſtified the eagerneſs with which they looked for the deliverance, by coming to worſhip at

* Plato ſays it is neceſſary that mankind ſhould wait till a Redeemer (or divine teacher) ſhould come, to ſhow them how they ought to conduct themſelves towards God, and towards man. When ſhall that time come (ſays he), and who ſhall be that teacher? Moſt gladly would I ſee that man who he is. His own words are theſe, Αναγκαῖον ἐν τῳ περιμενειν ἕως αν τις μαθη ὡς δεῖ πρὸς Θεους καὶ πρὸς Ανθρωπους διακεῖσθαι. Ποτε ἐν παρεσται ὁ Χρονος ὁυτος: καὶ τις ὁ παιδευσων? ἡδεσα γαρ αν μοι δοκω ἰδεῖν τουτον τον Ανθρωπον τις ἐστιν. Alcib. ii. de Prœcat.

the feet of the * Redeemer, upon the firſt notice they had of his appearance upon earth. That notice indeed was given them by ſuch a mode of intimation, as demonſtrated, that the joy occaſioned by this memorable event extended even beyond the whole human race, and the earth which they inhabit. The very heavenly bodies proclaimed his nativity to the wiſe men, as the angel had done to the ſhepherds; and the ſtar which aroſe in the moſt diſtant regions of the eaſt, ſet not till it had reached the houſe of Joſeph in Bethlehem. Thus, in a wonderful ſenſe of the words, did *the † heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament ſhew forth his handy work;* while not only the earth but the univerſe rejoiced, in the ſtupendous effects of his goodneſs. For the angels in heaven, thoſe bleſſed ſpirits, who continually ſurround the throne of God, and are always ready to execute his will; who having kept their firſt eſtate, wanted no redemption for themſelves; who are already as happy as their nature admits of being made, continually beholding the face of God, and ſinging eternal praiſes to his name: thoſe pure and holy beings think it a condeſcenſion no way degrading to their exalted condition, to ſhow particular marks of joy on occaſion of the redemption

* Matt. ii. 1. 12. † Pſal. xix.

of

of mankind; nor has the angel eſpecially appointed to declare the glad tidings, ſooner delivered his meſſage, but ſuddenly there appears a multitude of the heavenly hoſt, all eager to chorus that delightful ſong, *_Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will towards men._

II. The beſt and only proper manner of expreſſing the joy we feel, on contemplating this inſtance of divine goodneſs, was what I ſaid the text offered to our conſideration in the ſecond place.

To expreſs any paſſion or emotion of the mind, men want not in general to be taught. The interjections in every language, ſome of which are common to them all, give ſufficient intimation of what we feel, to all that hear us: but in the preſent inſtance, our joy being more the reſult of rational conſideration than the effect of any ſudden paſſion, the proper expreſſion of it muſt be, not ſudden or violent, but ſubſtantial; not ſlight, but permanent; not giddy or tumultuous, but grave, decent and modeſt, ſuch as may ſhow the deep impreſſion of divine grace on our hearts, and be a proof of our gratitude for his unſpeakable mercy; ſuch as may be conſiſtent with that fear and awe, which is at all times due to God from man; that reverence with which we are commanded to re-

* Luke ii. 13, 14.

joice

joice unto him*, and with that purity and holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.

I would not be here underſtood, to exclude any proper degree of mirth and cheerfulneſs at this holy ſeaſon. On the contrary, I know nothing more expreſſive of our gratitude for the goodneſs of God, than a contented and cheerful enjoyment of his gifts and providential bounty to us. But ſurely there is a difference between mirth and madneſs, and the feaſt muſt be unworthy of a rational being, that ends not but with intemperance.

In many inſtances, the boundary between virtue and vice is ſo nice a line, that it is not eaſy to approach it with ſafety; at leaſt I am ſure, that he who always walks cloſe up to it, will often be in danger of ſtepping over to the wrong ſide. In all ſuch caſes, our beſt ſecurity lies in keeping well within the limits of our duty, and always ſtopping ſhort of the lengths we might poſſibly go without ſin. Thus our mirth would be moderate, our recreations innocent, and every unbending of the mind to pleaſure, ſerve to recruit the ſpirits for a more vigorous return to duty.

And this leads me to the third thing I propoſed to conſider, *viz.*

III. The manner in which the pleaſure we feel

* Pſal. ii. 11.

on

on this joyful occaſion, ought to affect our general conduct.

Now, under this head, the firſt thing that occurs to every ingenuous mind, is the vaſt obligation laid upon us by Almighty God, in the incarnation, birth, and other merciful acts of our ever bleſſed Redeemer; the juſt conſideration of which cannot but excite the higheſt gratitude on our part, for his unſpeakable goodneſs in all thoſe inſtances. That the only begotten Son of God, who is the brightneſs of his glory and the expreſs image of his perſon, without whom was not any thing made that was made, and by the word of whoſe power all things were upheld from the beginning; that he, I ſay, ſhould vouchſafe, to diveſt himſelf of that ineffable glory which ſurrounded him, and veil the ſplendor of his majeſty in a body of fleſh, is indeed a wonderful inſtance of condeſcenſion; but that he ſhould do it for the ſake of creatures, ſo far, ſo infinitely beneath him, for the wretched, poor, and helpleſs race of Adam, who had not only by falling from their firſt eſtate, rendered themſelves unworthy of his regard, but by rebelling againſt his authority, were become the objects of his juſt reſentment; this is an act of ſuch amazing clemency, ſuch unmerited, ſuch wonderful mercy, as no heart can fully conceive, nor language properly

perly expreſs. But thanks be to God, he hath himſelf pointed out a way, to expreſs our ſenſe of the high obligation we are under, more agreeable to reaſon and the divine wiſdom, than any that our words and thoughts could ſuggeſt, *viz.* embracing the Redeemer, as he is offered to us in the goſpel, by accepting his religion, ſubmitting to his authority, believing his doctrines, and obeying his precepts from a firm and ſtedfaſt faith in his promiſes.

This laſt indeed is what he eſpecially requires of us, and has made the expreſs condition of our acceptance with him. For after all that can be ſaid about the efficacy of faith, in the work of our juſtification in the ſight of God, it muſt be allowed, that the faith by which we are ſaved muſt be productive of its natural effect, which is obedience; and our Lord has marked the teſt of all religious ſincerity, in this ſhort but emphatical precept, *If ye love me, keep my commandments:* a precept founded on principles not leſs of nature than religion, and which therefore can no more be denied without folly, than it can be conteſted without wickedneſs.

Another happy effect on our lives, that ſhould ariſe from the due conſideration of the bleſſed ſubject of the preſent feſtival, is a cheerful and ready

ſubmiſſion

ſubmiſſion to the diſpenſations of divine providence, whether proſperous or adverſe. The conſideration that the good things we enjoy, are the free and unmerited gifts of God, ſhould make us receive them with thankfulneſs and humility: and when he is pleaſed to viſit us with any afflictive diſpenſations, we ought to balance our mercies againſt our trials, and fairly to allow the advantage where it is juſtly due. In this account, my brethren, (not to mention inferior favours) the mercy for which we are this day called upon to be thankful, makes an article of ſuch mighty importance, as infinitely to overbalance the greateſt evils of the moſt unfortunate life. The Son of God was a gift of ineſtimable value to mankind; and as we are aſſured that this was not withheld, when our neceſſities required the oblation, we may reſt ſatisfied, that the ſame generous benefactor will, in all caſes of inferior concern, be equally ready to afford the needful deliverance, whenever it is fit for us to receive conſolation. And thus the apoſtle argues, that * *if God ſpared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us all things?*

In all the ſorrow that can afflict us, let us re-

* Rom. viii. 32.

member

member the goodneſs of God, in ſending his Son into the world, to take away our ſins and reconcile us to himſelf; that our Redeemer ever liveth to make interceſſion for us, and that if we do the will of his heavenly Father, we ſhall finally be ſure to enter into his kingdom. This ray of hope, ſeen through even the darkeſt cloud, will compoſe our ſpirits, animate our faith, and ſtill our mournings, and enable us to rejoice even in tribulation.

Finally, brethren, as this was intended to be a ſeaſon of great joy to all people, let us endeavour to comply with its gracious deſign, by diffuſing the cheerful enjoyment of pleaſure, as far as our influence and power extend. Let us not at this time be deaf to the cries of our neceſſitous brethren, but, amid the pleaſures of the feſtive board, remember, that there are in our neighbourhood or acquaintance, thoſe to whoſe indigence the ſuperfluity of our tables would, in this inclement ſeaſon, prove a moſt comfortable relief. And let us not deny them that comfort and ſupport in their need, which we can fairly and reaſonably ſpare, from the unmerited bounty of their heavenly Father to us: a moſt endearing inſtance of which is the ſending his ever bleſſed Son into the world,

to

to be the propitiation for our ſins; who for us men and for our ſalvation, came down from heaven, and as at this time was made man for our redemption. To him with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, be glory, honour, and praiſe for ever and ever. Amen.

# SERMON IX.

PSALM xcv. 8. (old verſion).

*To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

WHEN we take a view of human nature, under all the circumſtances of our preſent condition, and conſider the eagerneſs of our deſire after happineſs, one would be inclined to wonder, how, in the univerſal purſuit of it, men ſhould ſo uniformly omit the means which are yet allowed to be the only effectual ones for obtaining it. That we are formed for happineſs, we naturally conclude from the acknowledged goodneſs of our Creator; but when we conſider how far we have deviated from the original rectitude in which we were created, and how often we have by our ſins forfeited our title to the felicity we pant for, one would think, that any the leaſt glimmering of hope to recover a benefit ſo ineſtimable, ſhould be received with gratitude, and embraced with rapture.

Now for this purpoſe, God has in mercy reveal-

ed

ed his will to us, and pointed out repentance as the method of obtaining his favour, and recovering a happineſs, even ſuperior to that which by the fall of our firſt parents we have loſt. And yet ſtrange to tell, men are hardly prevailed on to repent, though they know and allow its neceſſity as the only way to happineſs. They flatter themſelves indeed with hopes of happineſs, and by that ſupport themſelves in a kind of deluſive comfort, if at any time they turn their thoughts to the ſubject; but think it is time enough yet to ſet about the work, and that God will accept of their penitence, however late it begins. Thus, while they ſeem to magnify the mercy of God, they detract from his juſtice, and act as if indeed he were under ſome kind of obligation to beſtow eternal happineſs on them, whenever they ſhall vouchſafe to aſk him for it, or feel themſelves in the humour to accept it at his hands. Thus from day to day, and from year to year, do men defer their repentance, while yet they allow it to be neceſſary, and vainly hope for immortal glory, without any previous preparation to qualify them for it.

Wiſely therefore has the chureh, in all ages ever ſince the days of the apoſtles, ſet apart a ſolemn ſeaſon in every year which we call Lent; wherein all Chriſtians ſhould be taught and exhorted, to attend

attend more diligently to the performance of their duty; to enter into a more than ordinary conſideration of their eternal intereſt; to put on a firm reſolution of oppoſing their carnal luſts and paſſions, by inuring themſelves to a ſevere exerciſe of holineſs and virtue; to review their paſt lives, comparing and examining them by the ſtrictneſs and purity of God's law; deploring the many miſcarriages of which all muſt be conſcious, and ſtedfaſtly reſolving upon new and better obedience for the time to come. Theſe make up the proper buſineſs of this holy ſeaſon: and ſuch is the intention of this wholeſome diſcipline of the church: for we are not to imagine, that mere bodily faſting, to the injury of health, or the abſtaining from certain deſcriptions of food for a time (unleſs it be done with intent to mortify in us ſome evil and corrupt affection), conſtitutes any part of that reaſonable ſervice which God requires from his rational creatures.

All the creatures of God are good, when received with thankfulneſs and uſed with moderation: the true mortification of this holy ſeaſon therefore is, to mortify the deeds of the body; and the moſt acceptable faſt is perpetual temperance, as well in meat and drink as in the other enjoyments of life.

But if ſinners will not be reclaimed; if they

will

will neither ſet a time to themſelves, nor embrace the opportunity preſented to them by the church, God by his ſpirit hath aſſured them in his word, that he has ſet them a time, in which he expects them to repent, and beyond which he will not be intreated. *To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

From which words I ſhall take occaſion to conſider two things, which they chiefly point out to our notice.

I. The duty of repentance in general, comprehended in theſe words, *Harden not your hearts.* And,

II. The term to which the duty is limited: *To-day, if ye will hear his voice.*

I. Of the duty in general, *Harden not your hearts.*

To harden the heart is a ſcripture expreſſion which means, to act againſt the dictates of truth and the conviction of conſcience. Thus Pharaoh is ſaid to have hardened his heart, when he would not let the children of Iſrael go. He was convinced in his conſcience, that the God of Iſrael was the true God, by the judgments which he brought upon himſelf and his kingdom; and that Moſes was a true prophet, by whoſe inſtrumentality thoſe judgments were executed. This appears from

from his conſtantly ſeeking to Moſes for deprecating the divine wrath, and ſuing for mercy, whenever he deſired the preſent calamity to be removed. Yet he perſevered in his obſtinate diſobedience to the command of God, till at laſt he was made an object of his juſt vengeance, and a fearful example of his ſeverity againſt obſtinate and impenitent ſinners to all the world.

But we have in this Pſalm an inſtance of this hardneſs of heart, nearer at hand than Pharaoh. *Harden not your hearts as in the provocation; in the day of temptation in the wilderneſs; when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and ſaw my works.*

The Jews were a people ſelected from the reſt of the world, on whom God had beſtowed ſuch diſtinguiſhing mercies, as no other people enjoyed: they were conducted by the immediate preſence of God, by the hand of a prophet; fed by a perpetual miracle, and obliged by every tender tie both of prudence and gratitude to obedience; and yet we find them continually murmuring at the divine appointments, vilifying his mercies, and ever ready to break out into open rebellion and mutiny againſt his authority. Notwithſtanding the frequent and ſignal deliverances he wrought for them, by which they muſt be convinced of his almighty power, and continual preſence among them,

them, yet their rebellions were not the leſs frequent on that account, which drew from him the complaint and threatening, which we find in Numbers xiv. 11, 12. *How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the ſigns which I have ſhowed among them? I will ſmite them with the peſtilence, and diſinherit them*, &c.

Thus you ſee that in both theſe caſes the ſin was the ſame, *viz.* acting againſt the conviction of conſcience, and manifeſt acknowledged truth; which is in ſcripture called hardening of the heart; a crime, againſt which God has expreſſed the higheſt indignation, and which he has threatened with the ſevereſt inflictions of his vengeance. This we know, and willingly allow; we are provoked at the inſolent hardneſs of Pharaoh's heart, and are no leſs ready to condemn the obſtinate ingratitude of the Jews. But do we under theſe impreſſions rightly and impartially examine ourſelves?

Our convictions are at leaſt equal to Pharaoh's, our obligations greater than thoſe of the Jews. We are fully ſatisfied and convinced, that our God is the true God; that he has an undoubted right to lay his command upon us, and is fully intitled to our obedience. We know that he requires

quires us to practiſe the duties of juſtice, mercy, and true piety, under pain of his diſpleaſure; and though he has reſerved to himſelf the glorious prerogative of ſhewing mercy and granting pardon to ſinners, yet he has explicitly told us, that this can be done on no terms but that of repentance. Now muſt not the man be ſaid to harden his heart, who acknowledges all this, and yet will not repent? Who owns himſelf to be God's creature, and that to his bounty he owes his very being, and all the comforts and conveniencies attending it, and will yet continue to go on in his ſinful courſes, without ſorrow or remorſe; nor attempt to turn away from his wickedneſs that he hath committed, though he knows it is the only way by which he can poſſibly ſave his ſoul alive? Who owns and believes all the attributes of the divine nature, and yet neither fears his power nor ſtands in awe of his juſtice? If men would but conſider their natural obligations to obedience, and not ſtifle the dictates of reaſon and conſcience, they could not continue in diſobedience by their impenitence.

But Chriſtians have obligations of a ſtill higher nature to bind them. The Jews had the promiſe of the land of Canaan, a rich and plentiful country, a land flowing with milk and honey, to induce them

them to obedience, and a holy prophet was commanded to guide them in their paſſage to it: but what was the land of Canaan, or what are all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, when compared to the everlaſting ſplendor of thoſe heavenly manſions, which Chriſt is gone to prepare for believers in him? It is impoſſible to conſider ſeriouſly the mercies of God in the redemption of mankind, without concluding, that impenitent Chriſtians are guilty of more than Egyptian obſtinacy or Jewiſh ingratitude. Had the Jews a prophet to lead them through the wilderneſs for forty years? We have the eternal Son of God to direct our courſe, even to the end of the world. Had they ſtatutes and ordinances, revealed to direct their moral and religious conduct? The precepts of Chriſt's religion are infinitely better, its doctrines more pure, more ſatisfactory to an inquiſitive mind, and conſequently better ſuited to the glory of God, and the true dignity of a rational ſoul: its ſervices leſs formal, leſs burdenſome, leſs expenſive, and conſequently better calculated and contrived to produce in us a ſincere and univerſal obedience. Had they their ſacrifices appointed, to purify them from legal pollutions? The blood of Chriſt cleanſeth us from all ſin, by the merit of that ſacrifice, whoſe influence reaches,

even to purge the conſcience from dead works to ſerve the living God. It not only purifies from legal or carnal pollution, ſuch as the Jewiſh ſacrifices were to expiate, but cleanſes from all ſin; from the power as well as puniſhment of ſin, and reconciles us to the Father of our ſpirits, through the blood of the everlaſting covenant. But if under all theſe advantages, under a diſpenſation ſo manifeſtly ſuperior to all that went before it, men will ſtill continue impenitent, to what cauſe can we aſcribe their obſtinacy, but to the moſt obdurate hardneſs of heart? And yet with whatever regret we make the obſervation, we cannot but ſee that ſuch profeſſors of Chriſtianity do exiſt in the world; men who call themſelves Chriſtians, who profeſs to believe the doctrines of the goſpel, and preſume to hope for ſalvation through its promiſes, yet will neither regard its ſanctions, nor obey its precepts: who, in the language of the prophet * Jeremiah, *Hold faſt deceit, and refuſe to return; who are not aſhamed when they commit abomination, neither can they bluſh.*

But, my brethren, God is not to be deceived by their hypocriſy, neither can ſuch without repentance enter into the kingdom of heaven: for he calleth all men every-where to repent.

* Jerem. viii. 5. 12.

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This is the call of God to all ages and conditions of men, from the fall of Adam to the preſent hour. This was the commiſſion given to the prophets of old*. *Say unto the houſe of Iſrael, Repent and turn yourſelves from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations:* and again†, *Repent and turn yourſelves from all your tranſgreſſions, ſo iniquity ſhall not be your ruin:* with many other places of like import. This was the meſſage of John the baptiſt, who came to prepare the way of the Lord, ‡ *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* And this meſſenger being caſt into priſon, Jeſus himſelf went forth preaching and ſaying, § *Repent and believe the goſpel:* and again, *Except ye repent, ye ſhall periſh.* The ſame command he gave to his apoſtles, ‖ *And they went and preached that men ſhould repent.*

This in ſhort is the tenor of Scripture from beginning to end; and to ſhow the neceſſity of perpetuating the charge, Chriſt has appointed a ſucceſſion of paſtors in his church, who are to preach repentance for the remiſſion of ſins, even to the end of the world.

The extent of the duty thus conſidered, I come now to the ſecond particular pointed out to us in the

* Ezek. xiv. 6. † xviii. 30. ‡ Matt. iii. 2.
§ Mark i. 15. ‖ vi. 12.

words

words of the text, *viz.* the time limited for the performance of it. *To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

The term to-day requires not to be explained. Every child knows its plain and primary ſenſe, and in ordinary diſcourſe it muſt mean a preſent and immediate point of time. But in ſcripture language it ſeems to admit of a more extended ſenſe: for St. Paul, in quoting and commenting on this Pſalm, in the third chapter of his epiſtle to the Hebrews, directs them to exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, *i. e.* while the day-light of the goſpel continued to ſhine upon them, while they were illuminated with the graces of God's holy ſpirit, and the pure goſpel of Chriſt was preached to them, free from the corruptions of ſuperſtition and error.

The day is the ſeaſon of light, and it is given us to do our buſineſs in; becauſe a ſeaſon of darkneſs is to be expected. *The night cometh* (ſays our Lord) *wherein no man can work.*

The time of our continuance in life is very uncertain, and at any rate can be but of ſhort duration; and when death overtakes us, then begins our night; and our work muſt ceaſe whether we have finiſhed our buſineſs or not. Is it not then unreaſonable,

unreaſonable, to defer upon ſuch uncertain proſpects that work, which if it is not done, we cannot be ſaved? Is it not folly? Is is not even the worſt of madneſs? No time but the time preſent is allowed us to make proviſion for eternity. Our portion of that time is of all things the moſt uncertain, and yet we ſquander it away without care or concern, as if it were never to have an end.

To rouſe you from this unpardonable hardneſs of heart, permit me to addreſs my diſcourſe to two ſorts of perſons among you.

Firſt, let me intreat for a favourable attention from the younger part of my audience.

You, my dear friends, are now upon entering into life; you know not yet the cares, the anxieties, nor the miſeries of a ſinful world; ye are therefore in the proper ſeaſon for the enjoyment of pleaſure, and far from me be the wiſh to debar you from it! But I would earneſtly exhort you, to prefer thoſe pleaſures which are not to be extinguiſhed with the paſſing moment, but ſuch as will remain with you for ever. Theſe are the pleaſures of religion, and thoſe only: not the vain amuſements of an idle hour, far leſs the guilty enjoyments of ſinful gratifications.

Not but ſportive recreations, while guided by innocence,

innocence, and purſued with moderation, are ſtrictly conſiſtent with Chriſtian ſobriety, and at your time of life in ſome meaſure neceſſary, if not even commendable: but while we plead for them as recreations, we muſt remember they are not our buſineſs, at any period of our lives.

The proper and the greateſt buſineſs of life, is to prepare for its end: and though you have the proſpect of many years to come, before your concluding ſcene arrives, yet remember how many of your equals have been diſappointed; how many have fallen around you, whoſe proſpects were once as fair as yours!

*To-day then, if ye will hear his voice, O harden not your hearts*, but liſten to the calls of grace, and let your minds be early occupied in that bleſſed employment, which will afford you unſpeakable pleaſure when the faſhion of this world ſhall paſs away; will follow you into the inviſible world, and conſtitute your glory and happineſs there to all eternity. **Remember now* (ſays the preacher) *thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou ſhalt ſay, I have no pleaſure in them. While the ſun, or the light, or the moon, or the ſtars, be not darkened,*

* Eccles. xii. 1, 2. 5.

*nor*

*nor the clouds return after the rain: and deſire ſhall fail: becauſe man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the ſtreets.*

To the aged, I ſhould hope few words need be ſaid. Your wiſdom, and the experience of the many years which God has granted you, have taught you (I truſt) the neceſſity of repentance, long before you could poſſibly hear it from me. But if not, it is my duty to remind you, that the day is far ſpent, and that conſequently the night muſt be at hand. Ye muſt not expect to live ſo long as ye have done: ye cannot like Joſhua ſtop the ſun in his courſe: and few ſuns are to riſe for you, compared with thoſe ye have already waſted.

I can bear with the infirmities of our common nature; I can feel a degree of pity when I behold the lapſes of youth, while the current of the blood is rapid, and paſſions by nature violent are overborne by temptations too ſtrong for the inexperience of tender years to reſiſt; I can pity their miſcarriages, and pray that they may live to ſee their errors, and tread back the falſe ſteps they have made. But to ſee grey hairs, and limbs tottering on the brink of the grave, attended by all the infirmities of old age, ſquandering away the poor remainder of a profligate life, with ſuch miſerable

innocence, and purſued with moderation, are ſtrictly conſiſtent with Chriſtian ſobriety, and at your time of life in ſome meaſure neceſſary, if not even commendable: but while we plead for them as recreations, we muſt remember they are not our buſineſs, at any period of our lives.

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rable want of œconomy as would diſgrace a child: this is a ſhocking ſight, and ſuch as cannot be beheld without contempt and indignation.

But have not I been drawing an imaginary portrait? With reſpect to you I truſt I have. I hope in Chriſt there is not one who hears me, that bears a likeneſs to a deſcription of ſuch frightful deformity: but that ſuch are in the world, and that I have with horror ſeen them, is what with much regret I muſt affirm.

With ſuch deſperate wretches what can be done, but to avoid as much as poſſible their peſtilential ſociety, and pity, for we cannot help them.

Finally, brethren, let us all reſolve to employ the preſent ſeaſon to the pious purpoſes for which our venerable church preſents it to us. Let us in this our day, while it is called to-day, while this holy ſeaſon continues, devote ourſelves in a more particular manner to acts of penitence and reformation. Let us examine ourſelves with care reſpecting our former converſation, and try to amend whatever we find amiſs, either in the temper of our minds, or the conduct of our lives.

The outward exerciſe of bodily faſting, which was enjoined in the primitive church, may ſtill be uſed with advantage, if done for the mortification

of

of our inordinate affections; and if that good purpoſe be anſwered by it, we need not doubt but it is an acceptable ſervice; but faſting or eating can be of no uſe to us, if we are void of internal contrition; for it is evident that hypocriſy can faſt as well as devotion: nay, if the hypocrite happen to be the ſtronger man, he can probably bear to faſt longer than his pious neighbour. But what avails his faſting? He is but an hypocrite ſtill, and with the hypocrites he ſhall have his portion.

If then there be any of you who have yet to begin the bleſſed work of reformation, let me intreat you, for the Lord's ſake, to loſe no time in ſetting about it. Conſider the value of your time, that precious talent of which ye are the ſtewards, and that in ſtewards it is abſolutely neceſſary that a man be found faithful.

To thoſe who have made a progreſs in the work, who have felt that godly ſorrow for ſin which worketh repentance unto life, perſeverance only is needful. The holy ſpirit, which hath begun a good work in them, is both able and willing to complete it, if they will only proceed in a due dependence on him. And if they will do their endeavour to cleanſe themſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, he will enable them to perfect holineſs in the fear of God.

*Whoſo is wiſe will ponder theſe things, and they ſhall underſtand the loving kindneſs of the Lord**. Thoſe who have made a good progreſs in a religious courſe, will give glory to God for his mercy, in the opportunities he has given them for improvement, and for having granted them the wiſdom to uſe them aright. But thoſe who have the bleſſed work to begin, let them begin to-day. *To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

To-day is in ſome meaſure ours. To-morrow is not. And who can tell whether this night his ſoul may not be required of him, laden with thoſe unpardoned ſins, of which perhaps he propoſed to repent to-morrow?

May God give us grace in this our day, to mind and to know the things that belong to our peace, before they be for ever hid from our eyes. Grant this, O merciful Father, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

* Pſal. cvii. 43. (old verſion).

SER-

# SERMON X.

## Acts xxiv. 25.

*And as he reaſoned of righteouſneſs, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and anſwered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient ſeaſon I will call for thee.*

IN the hiſtory from which theſe words are ſelected, we find the apoſtle in circumſtances of peculiar danger, and ſuch as might naturally have excited fear in the breaſt of the moſt courageous man alive; and yet acting with ſuch undaunted magnanimity, as to excite that paſſion in the very man before whoſe tribunal he ſtood, and who had over him the greateſt power to which human authority can poſſibly extend, *i. e.* the power of life and death.

The particulars of the ſtory may therefore deſerve ſome attention.

From chap. xxi. 27. we find, that the apoſtle was accuſed by the Jews at Jeruſalem, as a perverter of religion; as one that taught all men every-

every-where, againſt the people, and the law, and the temple; nay, and who had even defiled that holy edifice, by introducing ſtrangers into it: and ſuch was their rage againſt him, that had not the officer who commanded in the caſtle humanely and ſeaſonably come to his relief, with a ſtrong party of men, this barbarous and lawleſs mob would have murdered him upon the ſpot; nor did their malice ceaſe with this eſcape: for having entered into a ſecret conſpiracy againſt his life, the ſame officer found it neceſſary to ſend him under a ſtrong guard to Ceſarea, to defeat their wickedneſs, and reſcue him from their cruelty. Here Felix was governor, and conſequently to him was Paul remitted: and as he makes a conſpicuous figure in our preſent ſubject, it may not be amiſs to take a ſhort view of his character.

He had gradually riſen from * ſervitude to his preſent power by the arts of addreſs and intrigue, too commonly practiſed by men of aſpiring and ambitious minds, who have acceſs to the ears of princes and courtiers. After he came to his government, however, he had been very active in ſuppreſſing robberies, which before his time had greatly prevailed in Judea, by the neglect of former magiſtrates: but in the adminiſtration of his

* He and his brother Pallas were freed men. Tacit. lxii.

office

office he had frequently been guilty of the moſt ſhameful perverſion of * juſtice, the moſt bare-faced partiality, and particularly of the barbarous murder of † Jonathan the high prieſt. At the period we are now conſidering, he lived in an infamous manner with a Jeweſs by name ‡ Druſilla, whom he had ſeduced from her lawful huſband, to the open ſcandal of religion and good manners.

Before this man was Paul brought, to anſwer to the accuſation of an enraged council with their high prieſt at their head, backed by the venal elo-

* Tacitus ſays, that while Felix was procurator of Judea, he acted in a very arbitrary manner, and ſcrupled no manner of injuſtice. Lib. xii. c. 11.

† It was on the recommendation of this ſame Jonathan, that Felix was appointed procurator of Judea by the emperor Claudius: but he behaved in ſuch a manner in his government, that Jonathan often admoniſhed him to correct his adminiſtration; for that otherwiſe he (Jonathan) was in danger of the people's reſentment, for having procured them ſuch a magiſtrate. To ſilence theſe remonſtrances, he by a large ſum of money corrupted an intimate friend of the high prieſt, who got him aſſaſſinated.

‡ Druſilla had been married to Azizus, king of the Emeſenes; but this marriage Felix contrived to diſſolve, by ſending to her one Simon, a Jew of Cyprus, who pretended to magic: this man had the addreſs to perſuade her to leave her huſband, and marry Felix, who would make her perfectly happy if ſhe did. She being at the ſame time provoked with the ill offices of her ſiſter Bernice, who envied her beauty, broke through the laws of her country, left her huſband, and lived with Felix. Joſephus Antiq. xx. 6.

quence

quence of an hireling orator, whom they had retained for their purpoſe. The judge, unjuſt as he was, could not condemn the apoſtle; his wiſe and manly defence confounded his accuſers, and ſtaggered even Felix himſelf, with all his prejudice and injuſtice about him: but though he could not condemn, yet neither would he acquit him; but ordered him ſtill to be kept in confinement, promiſing to hear him again when Lyſias, who had ſent him thither, ſhould be alſo preſent. In the mean time however, Druſilla, being a Jeweſs, was willing to learn ſomething of the caſe which had made ſo great a diſturbance among her countrymen; and Felix willing to gratify her curioſity, and probably his own at the ſame time, ſent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Chriſt. The governor had alſo other motives much worſe than curioſity for calling Paul frequently before him: for we are told in the verſe following our text, that *he hoped alſo that money ſhould have been given him of Paul, that he might looſe him: wherefore he ſent for him the oftener, and communed with him.*

Some may think it ſtrange, that Felix ſhould have had any hopes of receiving money by way of bribe from poor Paul the tent-maker, who ſo far from being rich, or poſſeſſing any conſiderable property,

perty, was frequently obliged to labour * with his hands for a ſubſiſtence: but Paul had told Felix, that † *after many years he came to bring alms to his nation, and offerings.* Felix therefore concluding, that ſince Paul was apprehended ſo ſoon after his arrival at Jeruſalem, that money had not yet been diſtributed, thought the apoſtle would be glad to part with ſome of it for his releaſe. He therefore had him frequently brought before him, to give him an opportunity of coming forward with a bribe, if he had a mind to offer one. This is only an inſtance of that meanneſs, to which avarice will have recourſe, and proves the truth of what hiſtory has recorded of the character of Felix; that he was covetous, rapacious, and unjuſt, not ſtudying ſo much as perverting juſtice in his office.

The effect of his diſcourſe we have in the words of our text. *Felix trembled.* What! the governor, the Roman judge, ſeated on the bench of power, and ſurrounded by its creatures and ſupporters, the flatterers of his vanity, and the inſtruments of his will. Did this man tremble at the voice of his priſoner? Yes, my brethren, Felix trembled. But why? What could make him tremble? We are told in the text. Paul *reaſon-*

* Acts xx. 34. 1 Cor. iv. 12. † Acts xxiv. 17.

*ed*

*ed of righteouſneſs, temperance, and judgment to come.* That made him tremble.

When the apoſtle was required to give an account of this new doctrine, which had made ſuch a noiſe in the world, and ſtirred up the Jews in particular to give it ſuch violent oppoſition, he would naturally explain to the governor the principles of faith in Chriſt, and the neceſſity of a pure and holy converſation. The governor's conſcience muſt inform him, that he had violated the rules of righteouſneſs in many inſtances, more eſpecially in matters of diſtributive juſtice. Of his intemperance, Druſilla ſitting at his ſide, was an oſtenſible, and conſequently an undeniable proof; and when Paul, in his impreſſive and energetic manner, declared to him the certainty of a future ſtate, and proved that God would judge the world in righteouſneſs, and render unto every man according to his works, his mind was agitated with fear and remorſe. Here conſcience echoed the words of the apoſtle with redoubled force, accuſing him of guilt, and warning him of his danger. His * countenance fell, and he trembled. But though the apoſtle's diſcourſe was thus powerful to convince the governor of ſin, yet it had not the happy effect of turning him from it; but fearful as he was of the judgment to come,

* Heu quam difficile eſt crimen non prodere vultu.

and

and conſcious as he muſt be of his own demerit, he diſmiſſed the apoſtle with ſaying, that when he had a more convenient opportunity he would hear him again.

From this portion of ſcripture much uſeful inſtruction may be derived. The following will I truſt be ſuch to us all.

In the firſt place, I wiſh to impreſs upon your minds the wonderful power of that principle in the ſoul of man, by which we are made in ſome meaſure the judges of our own actions, and which we commonly expreſs by the term conſcience.

No one can perform any action of a moral nature, but his mind will immediately tell him whether it is good or evil: if it be good, his conſcience approves of it, and if evil, condemns it; and this antecedent to any written or exiſting law. It is not poſſible to do evil without injury, and common ſenſe informs us, that whatever is injurious muſt be wrong: this therefore is the law of God written in our hearts: it is coeval with our exiſtence, and muſt abide with us while we continue in being; and as our conſcience muſt be privy to all our deſigns, ſo our moſt ſecret actions cannot elude its vigilance. Of what mighty importance then muſt it be, to keep this our perpetual confident void of offence! It is indeed neceſſary, if we would paſs

our days in peace and tranquillity. Had Felix, like his priſoner Paul, exerciſed himſelf in having always a conſcience void of offence, the proſpect of a judgment to come need not to have made him afraid. It is conſcience (ſays the * poet) that makes cowards of us all. And why is this? if conſcience did not accuſe us of guilt, it could have no ſuch effect. But when we have tranſgreſſed the rules of righteouſneſs and temperance, God has given a power to this internal monitor, not only to make us ſenſible of our deviations, but alſo to puniſh us for them: for thoſe immoderate fears and diſquietudes, that haunt and haraſs a guilty mind, could never have an exiſtence, had not our Creator given a power to this faculty of the ſoul to excite them. This ſhould be a warning to all men, and ſtand in place of a thouſand admonitions againſt committing any act which we may at any time wiſh to forget. For what can we do, of which our conſcience is not both the witneſs and the judge? And the worſt of all is, that the preſent judgment of conſcience is only the foretaſte of that awful ſentence, which ſhall hereafter be pronounced in thunder by the judge of all the earth.

Secondly, though the admonitions of conſcience

* Shakeſpear in Hamlet.

may

may be diſregarded, and its reproofs neglected, for a ſeaſon, yet it cannot be wholly ſtifled, nor its power ſo extinguiſhed, but that it will awaken at ſome time or other; and like a worm gnawing in wood, the longer it is concealed the greater havock it will be found to have made.

This is eſpecially the caſe, when any painful or afflictive diſpenſation befals the ſinner, and rouſes him to a ſenſe of what his crimes have deſerved. Conſcience then applies the misfortune to the miſdeed, and makes him ſeverely feel the gnawings of the worm that never dies.

Of this we have a memorable inſtance in the hiſtory of Joſeph. His brethren had ſold him into ſlavery in his youth, and many years had elapſed, during which they ſeem to think nothing of either the accidents to which he might be expoſed, or the grief of an aged parent for his ſuppoſed death: but no ſooner are they apprehended as ſpies (of which they were perfectly innocent), but the crime of which they are conſcious flies in their face, and extorts from their guilty ſouls this melancholy confeſſion: **We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we ſaw the anguiſh of his ſoul when he beſought us, and we would not hear: therefore is this diſtreſs come upon us.* So when the apoſtle

* Gen. lxii. 21.

reaſoned

reaſoned of righteouſneſs, Felix would remember the fate of Jonathan; when he repreſented the neceſſity of temperance, the reſtraint of appetite, the government of paſſion, and chaſtity of life, the ſight of Druſilla, who ſat ſo near him, went like a dagger to his heart: but when Paul came to explain to him the judgment to come, and ſet the terrors of the Lord in array before him, his whole frame was ſhaken to convulſion, and the great, the noble, the fortunate Felix trembled.

This, my brethren, is a ſolemn and important leſſon to us all; may God enable us to profit by it.

The dictates of conſcience may be reſiſted: it may be ſmothered in the crowd of courts and cities: the drunkard may attempt to drown it in the cup of intoxication, or the luxurious to lull it aſleep by any criminal and forbidden indulgence: but a time will aſſuredly come, when all thoſe deluſions will vaniſh from the view; and leave nothing behind them, but darkneſs, horror, and remorſe.

We are not indeed likely to be, as Joſeph's brethren were, taken up for ſpies, nor like Felix to be preached to by an apoſtle: but there are abundance of events in life common to us all, that ought to call our thoughts inward, and make us conſider

whether

whether the doctrines of righteouſneſs, temperance, and judgment to come, may not open to us ſuch proſpects of our own minds, as ought to awaken our fears. Happy would it be for us, could we be perſuaded to enter into theſe thoughts, before it be too late to reap advantage from the review. Every diſtreſs, every affliction we endure, ſhould make us reviſe our own conduct in every point of view; and if we do ſo with an impartial honeſty, I fear we ſhall often diſcover, that we are verily guilty concerning our brother.

In the day of proſperity (ſays Solomon) rejoice; but in the day of adverſity conſider. Conſider thy own life. See if thou haſt not deſerved the affliction thou feeleſt; and when thou haſt made this diſcovery, humble thyſelf under the mighty hand of God, and praiſe him for his fatherly correction.

Thirdly, We ſee that conſcience is a natural principle in our compoſition; an impreſſion ſtampt upon the ſoul by the hand of God, before any written law, and from which no written law can ſet us free. It is as a judge whoſe tribunal is erected in our hearts, and contrary to all the forms of every other earthly tribunal, requires no evidence but ourſelves, and upon our own teſtimony acquits or condemns us without error and without

out appeal. Its deciſion is always according to truth, and its power irreſiſtible.

Laſtly, We who are bleſſed with the light of the goſpel, have an advantage over all who went before us, in regard to the regulation of our lives, and conſequently the purifying of our conſcience. We are not left to trace out our duty, as the heathens were, by painful or uncertain deductions of reaſon, from premiſes little known and leſs underſtood: our religion, both as to faith and practice, is clearly revealed to us, and the line of conduct we ought to purſue, we have no need to gueſs at; we are plainly told it. If then the preaching of an apoſtle could rouſe the proud ſoul of the heathen Felix to a ſenſe of his guilt and danger, how much more ought the word of God, which we have in our hands, to move us to flee from the wrath to come, of which he had but very obſcure notions, but which is ſo explicitly revealed to us?

Felix did well to ſend away the preacher, becauſe his diſcourſe made him tremble without hope; but thanks be to God our condition is not ſo forlorn: we have hope held out to us, through a gracious diſpenſation of mercy, that the tears of repentance may waſh out the ſtains of ſin, and *the blood of Chriſt, who, through the eternal ſpirit, offered himſelf without ſpot to God, purge our conſci-*

*ence*

*ence from dead works, and purify us from all filthineſs both of fleſh and ſpirit*, that we may *perfect holineſs in the fear of God.* Let us not then refuſe to hear, but eagerly liſten to the ſacred voice of God calling us to repentance; nor let us, like the impenitent Felix, diſmiſs the ſubject to a pretended convenient ſeaſon: for no ſeaſon can be depended on but the preſent. *To-day* (ſays the Pſalmiſt) *if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.* To-day is the only time we can truſt to; for who may enjoy or ſee to-morrow, * God only knows. I ſhall now conclude the whole with the encouraging exhortation of the prophet Iſaiah, lv. 7. *Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

* Quis ſcit an adjiciant hodiernæ craſtina ſummæ
Tempora Di Superi? Hor.

SER-

# SERMON XI.

MATT. xxiv. 36.

*But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*

THE human mind is ſo naturally inquiſitive, that curioſity may not improperly be termed an univerſal paſſion. This in itſelf is a principle nowiſe unbecoming our nature, or unfit for our condition, as it certainly proceeds from that inſatiable thirſt of knowledge, which is the true characteriſtic of a rational ſoul; and when exerciſed only upon ſuch objects as are within our ſphere, becomes the ſource of wiſdom and learning, the foundation of every uſeful art, every elegant and ornamental endowment of the mind. But when ſuffered to run out of its proper limits, and pry into matters beyond our capacity, it leads only to vain conjectures and fruitleſs diſputes, or elſe to ſuch anxiety and uneaſineſs of mind, as its higheſt poſſible gratification cannot make us amends for.

To apply this obſervation to the ſubject I am now

how to treat of, I muſt refer you to the beginning of this chapter; where we find our Lord had foretold the entire demolition of the temple and city of Jeruſalem. The prediction of an event ſo calamitous to the Jewiſh nation, could not but excite an eager curioſity in the diſciples, for more particular information concerning the fatal cataſtrophe; and accordingly they took the firſt convenient opportunity to aſk him when theſe things ſhould be?

The queſtion was natural, and not uncommon; and I doubt not but moſt men in the like circumſtances would be inclined to make the ſame inquiry. But if we attend to the conduct of our Lord upon this occaſion, though it will not convey a direct anſwer to the queſtion, it may afford ſome uſeful inſtruction.

Had he marked out the preciſe time, when the deſtruction he foretold was to happen; beſides that it would not have altered the diſpenſations of providence, or diverted the ſlighteſt part of the impending ruin, it muſt have had this bad effect: men would have looked with fear and trembling, for the completion of the alarming prediction, and aggravated by previous terrors every evil they were doomed to ſuffer. Therefore, inſtead of ſatisfying an improper curioſity, he warns them not

to be led away by the falſe pretences of the ſpurious Chriſts and prophets that would appear among them; to continue firm and ſtedfaſt in the religion he had taught them, and not run after ſuch wild and fanatical teachers: that they ought not to waſte their time in ſuch idle ſpeculations, and prying into matters of which the knowledge could do them no real ſervice; but rather to improve the preſent time to ſuch good purpoſe, that, whenever it ſhould pleaſe God to fulfil the prediction, they might be ready at his call to obey the purpoſes of his providence. He tells them at the ſame time, that the generation of men then upon earth ſhould not be extinct, till all that he had told them ſhould be fulfilled: *But of that day and hour* (ſays he) *knoweth no man.*

We find from this and other places of the New Teſtament, that our Lord never gratified the curioſity of his diſciples, when it led to ſubjects improper for them to ſpeculate upon or dive into. Thus when they deſired to know who was greateſt in the kingdom of heaven, thinking probably that he would have named ſome of themſelves, he checks their impertinent ambition and vain curioſity, by ſetting a little child before them; telling them at the ſame time, that unleſs they were converted, unleſs they would renounce that carnal and

and ambitious temper which had ſuggeſted the inquiry, and ſtudy to imitate the innocence and ſimplicity of children, they could not gain admittance to any, even the loweſt rank among the ſubjects of his kingdom. Thus, inſtead of anſwering an improper queſtion, he more wiſely turned it into an occaſion of teaching them a leſſon of wiſdom and humility, uſeful not only to themſelves, but to all who ſhould hear it in future. Matt. xviii. 1, 2, 3, 4.

Again when, after his reſurrection, his diſciples were aſſembled with him, and, ſtill blinded by the Jewiſh notion of the Meſſiah's temporal reign, aſked him, *Lord, wilt thou at this time reſtore the kingdom of Iſrael?* inſtead of anſwering to their inquiry, as they no doubt expected, his reply is expreſſed rather in terms of reproof than ſatisfaction. *It is not for you to know the times and the ſeaſons which the Father hath put in his own power.* Acts i. 6, 7.

We therefore fairly conclude, that however our curioſity may be exerciſed, in matters within our proper ſphere, and from which uſeful knowledge may be derived, yet there are other ſubjects, on which it becomes us to curb or ſuſpend it, becauſe God has reſerved the knowledge of them to himſelf.

This is eſpecially the caſe with reſpect to the ſublime

ſublime myſteries of religion, whether relating to the nature or the providence of God. Of the former we know ſo little, that it ſcarcely deſerves the name of an idea: and of the latter, we are no leſs incompetent judges.

Frſt, as to the nature of God: We are told that he is a ſpirit: but what know we of the nature of ſpirits? The very deſcriptions which the ſcriptures, in condeſcenſion to our weakneſs, give us of God, is itſelf a proof of our utter inability to comprehend him: that he is infinite, immortal, unchangeable, inviſible, and the like; all which are negative terms; and as no other than ſuch are uſed in any of our definitions of a ſpirit, this plainly proves that nothing poſitive can be aſſerted of it, in language ſuited to our conceptions.

The myſterious union of the bleſſed Trinity, and that of the divine and human natures in the perſon of Chriſt our Saviour, are doctrines poſitively revealed to us in the word of God; but of the nature of that union, and the manner of it, we are not informed; and if it had pleaſed the Almighty to give us any deſcription of it, the probability is, that we ſhould not have been able to comprehend it. Theſe are ſubjects too vaſt for finite minds to underſtand; and all the arguments that have been uſed, and all the volumes that have been written

about

about them, have tended to create unprofitable diſputes, about opinions on which neither party could decide, in a manner ſatisfactory to a rational and impartial inquirer.

The queſtion which Zophar put to Job, * *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God? Canſt thou find out the Almighty to perfection?* is one that muſt be anſwered in the negative, by the wiſeſt and the moſt learned of the ſons of men.

Secondly, Another thing which lies deep in the councils of God, and of which we cannot form any juſt and adequate conception, is the nature of thoſe rewards and puniſhments which are determined upon vice and virtue in the next life. It is true, that in order to make a proper impreſſion upon our minds, to make us deſire and endeavour after the one, and deter us from deſerving the other, they are deſcribed to us under the figures of thoſe things, which in this world excite our moſt eager purſuit, or our greateſt dread and averſion: but of what they are in their own nature, we are wholly ignorant; and ſo muſt continue till we come to prove them: for the glory of the ſaints approved of by God, is as far above the moſt ſublime and elevated of our pleaſures in this world, as the pains and ſufferings of thoſe who ſhall incur the ſen-

* Job xi. 7.

tence

tence of damnation exceed the moſt formidable complication of evils, with which we can be afflicted in this life: and they are both ſuch, as * *eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.*

Thirdly, Another thing, of which it is manifeſtly the will of our Creator to leave us in ignorance, is the future contingency of our own lives, and the uncertainty of their end. That this life muſt come to an end, we all know, but none of us know when; nor are we leſs ignorant of the accidents that lie between the preſent moment and the laſt. This, though it may ſeem a matter of more immediate concern to us than either of the former, lies juſt as much out of our knowledge as any of them: and it may be truly ſaid, that we know as little what to-morrow will bring forth, as we do the moſt diſtant effect of the moſt hidden cauſe in nature. Every moment teems with unexpected incidents, and we are frequently ſurpriſed with effects quite contrary to what we think their cauſes ought to have produced. If to prove the truth of this obſervation we look back into the hiſtory of mankind, the inſtances of it are innumerable.

Who, for example, that had ſeen Joſeph, thrown into a pit, and afterwards ſold for a ſlave, when in

* Corinth. ii. 4. Iſaiah lxiv. 4.

the

the anguiſh of his ſoul he beſought his brethren, and they refuſed to liſten to the voice of his ſupplication: who, I ſay, that had witneſſed this barbarous and diſtreſſing ſcene, would have ſuppoſed that all this affliction was but paving the way to his advancement? Or who that had ſeen him caſt into priſon by the rage of a jealous maſter, on the baſe aſperſion of a ſlighted woman, could have imagined that this was only another ſtep towards his promotion, and that the very Potiphar by whom he had been ſo unworthily treated, ſhould ſo ſoon look up to him as his ſuperior, and pay implicit obedience to his orders? Or who that had beheld Moſes, a poor helpleſs and forlorn infant, deſerted by his parents, and expoſed to periſh among the ruſhes and ſedges of the Nile, could have imagined that he was deſtined to be the mighty leader of his nation, who was to deliver them from the power of an arbitrary and cruel tyrant, and a formidable army? How little did Jezebel imagine, when attiring her hair, and painting her face, and adorning herſelf in all the gaudy elegance of royal magnificence, to attract admiration and command reſpect, that ſhe was only preparing a more ſplendid object of contempt and abhorrence, to become in a moment a feaſt for the dogs in the ſtreet!

And to name no more, ſee the great, the powerful

ful Haman*, the ruler of no leſs than an hundred and ſeven-and-twenty provinces, when intent on the deſtruction of the whole nation of the Jews, who were apparently by royal mandate delivered into his will, erecting a gibbet, which, contrary to his expectation, was ſuddenly converted into the inſtrument of his own † execution.

Thus are we all in uncertainty, with reſpect to future contingent events, not knowing what the next hour may produce; whether the moſt afflictive diſpenſations may not in the end prove bleſſings to us, or the moſt proſperous events, the moſt flattering proſpects, may not end in diſappointment, deluſion, or death.

It may from thence be natural to aſk, why this ſhould be? What wiſe purpoſe of providence can be anſwered, by leaving man thus ignorant of his fate, and of the ends and iſſues of his own conduct? The inquiry, I ſay, is natural; but it is alſo bold: nor does it become ſuch creatures as we are, to pry with a too curious eye into the reaſons of the divine determinations, or canvaſs with unbecoming freedom the ſettled order of his government, *whoſe* ‡ *judgments are unſearchable, and his ways paſt finding out.*

But let us ſee whether ſome account of this

* Eſther i. 1. † Ver. vii. 10. ‡ Rom. xi. 33.

matter

matter may not be given, conſiſtent with the humility which becomes us as the creatures of his power, and the adoration due to his wiſdom and goodneſs.

Man was at firſt created in the image of God, and by him endued with the principles of perpetual vigour and immortality. Such a portion of wiſdom and power was alſo beſtowed on him, as might enable him to govern the creatures that were made ſubject to his dominion, and to promote his own happineſs: but when ſin had introduced death into the world, and with it all the wickedneſs and conſequent confuſion and miſery of a ſhort and ſinful life; our benevolent Creator, yeilding with reluctance to the dictates of juſtice in our puniſhment, in mercy added ignorance to the condition of our being, to ſave us from the continual pain and diſtreſs to which we muſt be expoſed, did we in all caſes foreſee the many evils incident to a frail and fallen condition. And a great mercy it certainly is, to conceal from us thoſe things which do not immediately concern our beſt intereſt, and the knowledge of which would give us ſo much pain and uneaſineſs.

To inſtance in the caſe of future contingent events: did we certainly know the conſequences of our own actions in all caſes, we ſhould frequent-

ly be diſcouraged in our nobleſt and moſt laudable purſuits by the foreſight of a diſappointment; which, as things are now, we know nothing of, till perhaps a better end is anſwered than even our ſucceſs would have produced.

Would the merchant, for example, venture upon an enterpriſe of foreign commerce, if he foreſaw the ſtorm, which, though it wrecks his ſhip and impairs his fortune, clears the air and relieves a whole kingdom from a peſtilential infection? Or would the farmer beſtow ſo much labour on the proper tillage of his land, and be ſo anxious to ſow the beſt ſeed in the moſt proper ſoil and ſeaſon, if he were ſure that he ſhould die before harveſt? Thus the buſineſs of all the world muſt be at a ſtand, and our whole lives be uſeleſs to ourſelves and all around us.

Beſides, were we to foreſee all the incidents that lie before us in the preſent chequered ſcene, I am afraid the happieſt of mankind would feel more pain than pleaſure in the proſpect.

Were it put in the power of a wiſe man, who has lived beyond the meridian of life, to begin his time again; to ſet out with his former inexperience, and paſs through the ſame ſcenes as before; I believe few would be found willing to accept the offer, after fairly balancing the evil with the

good

good they have ſeen. How much then muſt thoſe evils have been aggravated by foreſight and the dreadful expectation which that preſcience muſt beget! And what a diſtracting addition muſt it be for men to have before their eyes the diſmal proſpect of thoſe that are yet to come!

If it be ſaid, that the proſpect of good would counterbalance the effects of that of evil in our lot; this, upon examination, will be found to be a miſtake: for, firſt, it is very doubtful if there be ſo much good as evil in the life of man; ſince he is as naturally * *born to trouble as the ſparks fly upward.* And, ſecondly, whoever accurately conſiders human nature, will not ſcruple to allow that our pleaſures are enjoyed with double reliſh for being unexpected; and the proſpect of a misfortune which we expect makes our ſufferings more poignant than perhaps the calamity itſelf when it actually befals us: at leaſt it is ſure to make us unhappy for a longer time than if it overtook us unawares.

Thus, in every view of the ſubject, it muſt appear matter of great thankfulneſs to God, that he has made us what we are; that he has endued us with ſuch powers and faculties of mind and body, as he knows to be the moſt proper for our condi-

* Job v. 7.

tion.

tion. He has given us knowledge ſufficient to lead us to our duty and our happineſs, if we improve it as we ought: and has aſſured us that if we do the one, we ſhall not fail of the other.

Let us therefore enjoy the preſent hour, in doing what he hath commanded us, and leave the future, into which we cannot penetrate, to the wiſer diſpoſal of our heavenly Father, in the full aſſurance that thus we ſhall be in far better hands than our own.

Hence it is natural to infer, that we ought to ſubmit with cheerful reſignation, to all the diſpenſations of providence; convinced that the diſpoſals of an infinite wiſdom and goodneſs muſt be perfectly wiſe and good, though the ſhortneſs of our ſight, and the narrow limits of our underſtanding, cannot always ſee to the end of them: to receive his comforts as the bleſſings, and his ſeverities as the corrections of a beneficent Father; ſince both may be turned to our eternal advantage, if thus we conſider and improve them.

Again, if our ſchemes in life miſcarry, and we are diſappointed in any reaſonable expectation we have formed, we have ſtill this conſolation to keep up our ſpirits, that the purſuit in which we have failed was our duty at the time we engaged in it; and if our ſucceſs has not anſwered to our wiſhes, or the pains we have taken, we are ſtill in the

hands

hands of his gracious providence, to whom belong the iſſues of life; whoſe prerogative it is to bring good out of evil; and who, when he ſees fit, can turn our diſappointment into a greater advantage than our ſucceſs would have produced, even upon our largeſt computation of its beneficial effects.

And, laſtly, we ſhould learn from hence patience, and a cheerful dependence upon divine providence, for whatever we hope or wiſh to obtain, as well as gratitude for the mercies which we already enjoy: not murmuring at our fate, becauſe our expectations ſeem to be poſtponed, or repining that others are, or appear to be, in more proſperous and happy circumſtances than ourſelves: Theſe are things in the ſole and abſolute diſpoſal of him who made us; and it is no leſs impious than abſurd, to ſet up our weak and fallible judgment in oppoſition to his appointments.

This we may be aſſured of, becauſe we have it from the word of unerring truth, * *that all things ſhall work together for good to them that love and fear God;* and that if we, *by* † *patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory, honour, and immortality*, there is a day to come when we ſhall receive an ample reward. *But of that day knoweth no man, no not the angels in heaven, but the Father only.*

* Rom. viii. 28. † Rom. ii. 7.

SER-

# SERMON XII.

ISAIAH i. 3. (latter part).

*But Iſrael doth not know, my people doth not conſider.*

IN the whole courſe of my life, I know not that I have met with a paſſage more truly awful and affecting than that which ends in the words I have read to you. Hear the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, appealing to his whole creation, and, as it were, calling upon every creature he has made, to juſtify the ſentence he was about to pronounce upon a hard-hearted, ungrateful, and rebellious people.

The prophet here addreſſes his nation in language ſo ſublime and pathetic, as evidently evinces the divine authority of his commiſſion, and, at the ſame time, the affectionate care and concern which God ſhows for their reformation; while their folly and ſtupidity are ſuch, as will not allow them to perceive either his power over all his works, or his peculiar goodneſs to themſelves.

*Hear*,

*Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath ſpoken: I have nouriſhed and brought up children, and they have rebelled againſt me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the aſs his maſter's crib: but Iſrael doth not know, my people doth not conſider.* Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth. What an appeal? And why this ſolemn call for attention? It is becauſe the Lord hath ſpoken. The Lord omnipotent, the Creator of you all. Ye heavens, deaf and inſenſible as ye are; and thou dumb and inanimate earth, hear that voice, whoſe order brought you into being. Hear what my people will not hear; liſten to my juſt complaint againſt them for obſtinacy, ingratitude, and rebellion. I have nouriſhed and brought up theſe children, as I promiſed their father Abraham. I multiplied their numbers in ſpite of the cruelty of their Egyptian perſecutors. I fed them with corn in Egypt, and with manna in the wilderneſs; I brought them into a rich and plentiful country, a land flowing with milk and honey; I gave them poſſeſſion of houſes which they had not built, and fields and vineyards which they planted not: and yet, O heavens and earth! this ungrateful people have rejected my law, deſpiſed my council, and reſiſted my authority. They have rebelled againſt me.

There is a degree of affectionate grief in this expreſſion,

preſſion, that gives a ſtriking idea of anxiety for his people, which we could not aſcribe to God if he himſelf had not revealed it by this very pathetic addreſs.

Ye who are parents will feel more intenſely the warmth of affection conveyed by the term *children* than others; becauſe the love of parents towards their children, is what none but parents can feel: but all may ſee by the alluſion, how theſe people's rebellion was aggravated, by being an act of ingratitude to a benefactor who had done ſo much for them and for their fathers.

The ox knoweth his owner, and the aſs his maſter's crib. This beautiful alluſion was intended to ſtimulate the Jews, by a compariſon which could not fail to mortify their pride, while it expoſed their folly, and rendered them inexcuſable even to themſelves: for what can be more mortifying to a proud and conceited libertine, than to be told, that he is more ſtupid than either of the dulleſt and leaſt ſagacious animals we know? Yet in the eſtimate of heaven, theſe Jews, and, conſequently all who rebel againſt God, are duller and more ſtupid than they: for thoſe animals know their benefactor and obey him, whereas theſe neither know nor conſider theirs.

Now the cauſe of this ſtupidity is here aſſigned

to

to be the want of conſideration. And moſt juſtly is it ſo: for would men duly conſider the vaſt importance of religion, the immenſe difference there is between this and any other concern; it is not poſſible they could ſo far deviate from reaſon and from duty as we often ſee they do.

Whence comes it then that men of ſenſe, rational agents, whom we ſee daily acting with the greateſt prudence, care, and circumſpection in other matters, are ſo extremely negligent and careleſs in this one thing needful? This is the more worthy of enquiry, as we find the complaint of it is not peculiar to Iſaiah, nor the caſe of Iſrael or Judah only: the other prophets expreſs themſelves in like manner, concerning other ſtates and countries at that time flouriſhing, whoſe deſtruction was determined by divine providence, becauſe they regarded not the work of the Lord, nor conſidered the operation of his hand. And what account but this can we give of the many who at this day do, as Job ſays, drink iniquity like water, and (as St. Paul) commit all uncleanneſs with greedineſs? who ſeem to have loſt all remorſe of conſcience for the moſt flagrant wickedneſs, and to lie under the ſame groſs and ſhameful ignorance of God's juſtice and their own condition? All this is purely becauſe they do not conſider.

Now ſurely this is a moſt provoking inſtance of

contempt: that the great and glorious majeſty of God ſhould publiſh a law, with ſo ſtrict a charge to learn and conſider it, to ſtudy and meditate upon it both by day and night, at home and abroad, when we lie down and when we riſe up; to make it our diſcourſe, our exerciſe, our delight; that ſuch great bleſſings are annexed to the performance, and ſuch ſevere and heavy judgments threatened to the neglect of this duty; and yet men ſhould ſo far ſlight and neglect that law, as to give it no place in their thoughts, nor conſider it at all.

But whence is this? How comes it to paſs that ſo many rational beings, intent on happineſs, ſhould neglect a duty ſo evidently neceſſary to enſure and render it permanent to themſelves?

For this fatal error, many cauſes have been aſſigned; but I think the following are thoſe moſt generally prevalent.

Firſt, the fear which ſinners feel that ſerious conſideration would diſturb their conſcience. They know the naughtineſs of their own hearts; they know their ways are not ſuch as pleaſe the Lord; and therefore they baniſh his law from their thoughts; becauſe they are ſenſible that their lives will not be able to abide the rigor of ſuch a teſt. For as * Solomon truly obſerves, wickedneſs con-

* Wiſd. xvii. 11.

demned

demned by her own witneſs is very timorous, and being preſſed with conſcience, always forecaſteth grievous things. This it was that made Felix tremble, when his priſoner Paul reaſoned of righteouſneſs, temperance, and a judgment to come. He pretended a deſire, indeed, of hearing him farther upon thoſe ſubjects, when he had a more convenient ſeaſon: but why that ſeaſon never came, we may learn from Joſephus, the hiſtorian of thoſe times, who tells us that Felix was a bad man, particularly in the caſe of Druſilla, who was not his, but another man's wife, whom he had ſeduced and carried off from her huſband by fraud and violence: and we are told in the Acts of the Apoſtles, of the hopes he had formed of receiving money for Paul's liberation: a proof of his meanneſs and avarice.

Righteouſneſs and temperance therefore had no place among his principles; and the thought of a judgment to come made him tremble. And I have no doubt but many avoid and neglect this duty, becauſe it would diſcover the malignity of thoſe faults which they do not chuſe to amend, and which render a future judgment a proſpect uneaſy to their fears.

Secondly, A ſecond cauſe of inconſideration the holy ſcripture takes notice of, not much unlike the

the former; which is, that worldly men being totally immerſed in the cares of this life and the pleaſures of a corrupt and ſenſual world, find no time for ſerious reflection. From the minds of ſuch men, the thoughts of God and their ſpiritual concerns are utterly ſhut out, and thus the ſoul has no room left for her own proper buſineſs. Thus the prophet * Jeremiah complains, that after all his preaching, *No man repented him of his wickedneſs, ſaying, What have I done? but every one turned to his courſe, as the horſe ruſheth into the battle.* By which compariſon the Holy Ghoſt gives us to underſtand, the eager ſolicitude with which men purſue the pleaſures or advantages of this life, and how hard, how very difficult it is to ſtop their obſtinate career, or recover them to a better mind and ſenſe of things.

The man of buſineſs thinks the whole of his time well beſtowed in acquiring riches; and when he has got them, what with the care of preſerving, and the dread of loſing them, he is as fully occupied as he was before in the acquiſition of them. The man of pleaſure is ſo buſy in dreſs and equipage, viſits of ceremony, parties of pleaſure, and a round of vain and trifling amuſements, that he cannot for a moment diveſt himſelf of theſe frivolous

* Jer. viii. 6.

impertinencies,

impertinencies, in order to conſider and examine the ſtate of his ſoul, and the concerns or proſpects of futurity.

A third ſort of inconſideration ariſes not from any ſettled purpoſe to do ill, nor yet from any great engagements to hinder men from doing better; but from a liſtleſs and indolent levity of diſpoſition, that will not brook the application neceſſary to the performance of this duty.

Theſe people regard life as a mere paſtime, and hardly look higher than to be tolerably amuſed for the moment; and yet are as highly pleaſed with themſelves as if their good works were ever ſo conſpicuous, and their light ſhining before all the world. Now this is the height of vanity and deluſion.

In the affairs of this world, men are not apt to be ſo careleſs. For what ſhould we ſay of a merchant who ſhould go on in his traffic for years without inſpecting his accounts, or balancing his profit and loſs? Might we not eaſily foreſee a confuſion in his affairs that muſt end in bankruptcy? Or if the pilot or commander of a ſhip ſhould attempt to make a voyage, without making obſervations or keeping a reckoning, could we expect him ever to arrive at his deſtined port? So much more in the buſineſs of religion is he guilty of folly, who

refuſes

refuſes the trouble of care and conſideration, as the damage and calamity conſequent upon ſuch neglect is much more dreadful, and more irrecoverable than any temporal or worldly loſs can be. For, alas! a time will come, when theſe careleſs and indolent ſouls ſhall be awakened from their fatal deluſion; when they muſt ſee and underſtand their miſery whether they will or no: when (as Jeremiah ſays)* *the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, and it ſhall fall grievouſly upon the head of the wicked: In the latter days they ſhall conſider it:* but it will then be too late, and the conſideration which would now be ſalutary, will then ſerve but to aggravate the terror of their proſpect, and the torment of their ſufferings. O then † *conſider this, ye who forget God, leſt he pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you.* Conſider, leſt the patience and long ſuffering of God be turned into wrath and indignation, and he tear you away to ſuffer for your negligence and inconſiderate folly, where there will be no hand to help, nor eye to pity, your miſerable and deſperate condition.

To ſave us from this moſt dreadful of all misfortunes, the firſt ſtep is conſideration; by which I mean, ſuch a degree of attention and thoughtful-

* Chap. xxiii. 19. † Pſal. l. 22.

neſs,

neſs, as will bring us to the knowledge of our condition with regard both to God and ourſelves; will diſcover to us the true ſtate of our ſouls; what progreſs we have made in virtue; and whereabout we have got in the journey towards that land of everlaſting reſt and happineſs, which our holy religion points out to us as the end of all our labours.

For this purpoſe, let us enter into ourſelves; let us examine our own principles as well as our paſt lives, and enquire whether they correſpond. This will bring to our view the errors and lapſes into which we have been betrayed, either by the ſuggeſtions of our ſpiritual enemy, the exorbtiant demands of irregular and diſorderly paſſions, or the force of outward temptations.

By this review we ſhall be enabled to perceive from whence our danger principally proceeds, and thereby to guard againſt its future approaches; to fortify our weak ſide, and prevent the enemy from taking advantage where we are moſt expoſed.

By this too we ſhall be led to form good and holy reſolutions, to avoid the occaſions of our falling, and make the beſt improvement of our future time, in order to repair the miſcarriages of that which is paſt.

* *I thought on my ways* (ſays the Pſalmiſt), *and*

* Pſal. cxix. 59, 60.

*turned*

*turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies. I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* You ſee by this how the conſideration of his paſt life was the means of reforming him; and there is no doubt but the ſame method will be always neceſſary for all who ſeriouſly mean to ſet about the great work of reformation. They muſt firſt conſider and ſee their ſins, in order to forſake them. And accordingly we find the prophet in this chapter purſues a method exactly agreeable to this: he firſt tells the Iſraelites the ſins of which they were guilty, with the dreadful judgments threatened to be poured out upon them for ſuch their wickedneſs; and then ſhows them how the mercy of God was to be obtained, by forſaking their ſins and reforming their lives. And this method is obviouſly agreeable to reaſon and the nature of things: for with the ſoul it happens juſt as with the body, in which it is impoſſible to perform a cure, till the nature of the diſeaſe and circumſtances of the ſick are underſtood.

From hence you may ſee that the conſideration to which I would exhort you, is that which regards the ſtate of your own ſouls. No man can be truly wiſe who is not wiſe for himſelf. All other wiſdom, however profound, if this be wanting, is no better than a building without a foundation. Our

Lord

Lord in the goſpel commends the ſteward who, when he was about to loſe his place, and ſaw poverty approaching, took care to make proviſion for it: and happy would it be for us, and few ſouls would be loſt, if we, like him, would conſider the approaching neceſſity, and make ſuch a prudent uſe of our time, that precious talent, of which we are ſtewards here on earth, as to provide for the eternity to come.

# SERMON XIII.

ISAIAH i. 3. (latter part).

*But Iſrael doth not know, my people doth not conſider.*

IN my former diſcourſe upon theſe words, I endeavoured to ſhow the advantage and neceſſity of conſideration for our well-doing here, and our eternal ſalvation hereafter. And in this I am warranted by the general tenor of holy writ. Thus the prophet Ezekiel makes it not only the beginning of all our virtue, but the cauſe of all we practiſe afterwards; and even of our pardon and acceptance with God: for to this purpoſe we read in chap. xviii. 27, 28. *When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedneſs that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he ſhall ſave his ſoul alive: becauſe he conſidereth and turneth away from his tranſgreſſions.* Job alſo declares, that in him it gave birth to the fear of God. * *When I conſider* (ſays he), *I am afraid of him.*

* Job xxiii. 15.

And

And Moſes preſcribes it as the principle of obedience to the law of God*. *Know, therefore, and conſider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God. Thou ſhalt keep therefore his ſtatutes and his commandments.* And again, when affectionately regretting the folly and wickedneſs of his people, and threatening their deſtruction for their impenitence, he thus expreſſes himſelf: † *O that they were wiſe! that they underſtood this: that they would conſider their latter end!* And to what but the want of this conſideration can we aſcribe the wicked lives of ſo many profeſſing Chriſtians as we behold, and cannot but lament in the world? To infidelity we cannot charge it: for if they be Chriſtians at all, they muſt of courſe believe ſome truths diametrically oppoſite to their practice.

For example, men do in general believe that there is a God; that he rewards the good and puniſhes the evil; that there is a heaven and a hell appointed for theſe purpoſes; and that God will finally judge the world in righteouſneſs and mercy, awarding to every man the recompence due to his works; and ſeveral other doctrines, which are commonly known and received: but they enter no farther into the matter; they do not apply the

* Deut. iv. 39, 40. † Deut. xxxii. 29.

general

general doctrine to their own particular caſe, not give themſelves the trouble to inquire how far thoſe things may concern themſelves; and therefore the doctrines, thus looſely entertained, have no effect upon their lives and actions: and this is the true reaſon why they live in a way ſo inconſiſtent with their profeſſion. For though the articles of our holy faith be of themſelves moſt forcible motives to holineſs and virtue; and though certain it is, that every doctrine of the Chriſtian religion has a tendency to purify our hearts, and regulate our moral conduct; yet if the powers of the mind be not exerciſed upon them, if they be not diligently looked into, frequently contemplated, and earneſtly applied, the virtue they poſſeſs will to us be of no uſe, but will remain as inſipid and inactive as if they were unknown or not believed; juſt as the moſt powerful medicines, adminiſtered with the greateſt ſkill and integrity, will never work a cure if the patient refuſes to take them. An example or two will make this matter plain.

How few are there who do not believe they ſhall die, and after death be judged; nay, and damned too, if they live and die in their ſins! and yet how few are there who live as if they believed this! Whence comes this to paſs? Becauſe they

believe

believe theſe things in a looſe and careleſs manner: they believe them in general terms, but never bring them home to themſelves, nor ſeriouſly conſider them.

The man believes he ſhall die, becauſe it were folly to deny a truth ſo univerſally proved by all that ever were born; but he knows not, nor does he conſider, how or when that event may take place; and therefore the thought gives him no concern: but did he look upon death as a thing at hand, that he were now at the point of it, and could no longer eſcape; did he well weigh what a ſad condition he may poſſibly be in at his laſt hour, to what pains, and fears, and agonies he may then be ſubject; did he conſider what a horrid, what a tremendous doom awaits him, if he dies in his ſins without repentance, and that not for a day, or a year, or a thouſand years, but for ever; did he, I ſay, conſider theſe awful ſubjects with the ſerioufneſs and attention they deſerve, he would ſurely feel himſelf differently moved, from what he is by the bare recital of them in vague and general converſation. Bnt herein lies the miſchief. We look forward to years, and think we may outlive them; not conſidering that the ſum of thoſe years we look at, may be the number of the hours we have to live; and this fatal miſtake in a matter

ter of ſuch mighty importance, is the reaſon that we defer the main buſineſs of life till our day is ſpent, and the night overtakes us, wherein no man can work.

But what egregious folly is this: to defer a work ſo needful to be done, depending on a bare poſſibility, where ſo many thouſand daily examples are againſt us!

Only look at the days that are paſt, and recollect how many have, within your own memory, been ſnatched out of the world, whoſe age, whoſe health, whoſe life were to all appearance as promiſing as your own, and whoſe deaths were as ſurpriſing to all their acquaintance as yours would have been? And what but the mercy of God hath ſpared you to this day? And who hath given you aſſurance of to-morrow? Theſe are queſtions of vaſt importance; and I pray God that ye may wiſely conſider them, and purſue the conduct to which they naturally tend.

It is an important duty of the Lord's day, when ye retire from the houſe of God, to ſit down and conſider what has paſſed while ye were there: and it is the more neceſſary, becauſe all the prayers you repeat, all the ſermons you hear, and all the books you can read, without conſideration, are of no uſe. Conſideration is that which awakens

awakens the ſoul to devotion, and devotion excites true piety, and piety kindles up a holy zeal, ready for the exerciſe of faith, hope, charity; every Chriſtian grace, and every moral duty. * *While I was muſing* (ſays the Pſalmiſt), *the fire kindled, and at the laſt I ſpake with my tongue.* Here was the natural fruits of pious meditation, the gradual progreſs of religion in the ſoul. It begins with conſideration, riſes into devotion, and finiſhes with the production of every good word and work.

By this we acquire the knowledge which is neceſſary to our progreſs in the way to heaven. I mean the knowledge of God, and of ourſelves. † *This* (ſays our bleſſed Lord), *is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom thou haſt ſent.* By the knowledge of God it is, that we are led to believe in him; for what faith can we have in one whom we know not? The Pſalmiſt ſays, They that know thee, will put their truſt in thee: and indeed we may add, that none but they do it.

But by the knowledge of God, I would be underſtood to mean, ſuch a knowledge as our holy religion teaches.

The nature and eſſence of God, it is not poſſible

* Pſal. xxxix. 4. † John xvii. 3.

for

for us to know; nor can we receive any diſtinct, or ſatisfactory information reſpecting it in this life: it is a knowledge *too wonderful and excellent for us, we cannot attain unto it:* but the Chriſtian religion teaches us, to know him as our creator, preſerver, and redeemer. By this we are taught to acknowledge him in his attributes and perfections; his majeſty, his mercy, his judgments, his hatred againſt ſin; his love of virtue and goodneſs; his gifts and promiſes to mankind, his grace, his will, his commandments, his threatenings, his dealings with ſaints and ſinners who have gone before us: hereby we are given to underſtand for what end he created and placed us in this world, what duties we have to perform, what helps we have to enable us to diſcharge them, what hinderances we may expect to meet with in our courſe, and how we may avoid them.

By this divine ſyſtem, we alſo learn the proper knowledge of ourſelves; of our fall from the original ſtate of rectitude, in which our nature was created, and our condition ever ſince that unhappy period; that we are weak, indigent, and helpleſs beings, the creatures of God's power, the penſioners of his bounty, continually depending on his providential care, to give us what we want, and defend us from what we fear.

Theſe

Theſe are truths which it behoves a Chriſtian to know, and the knowledge of which would naturally lead him to ſuch a conduct, as his religion tells him will be pleaſing to his Maker, and profitable to his own ſoul: but without due conſideration and ſerious reflection, theſe weighty and important concerns as to him totally uſeleſs; they paſs upon his ear like the ruſtling of wind through the trees, and leave no mark or impreſſion behind them.

Since, then, conſideration is ſo uſeful, ſo profitable, ſo indiſpenſably neceſſary to our ſalvation, what a lamentable ſight do we behold, in ſo many inconſiderate people as we ſee in the world; who, like Gallio, care for none of theſe things; who will not take the time, and have not the grace to conſider them; who labour, as it were, to divert their thoughts with objects agreeable to fleſh and ſenſe, and turn away their minds from ſerious reflection on thoſe which concern their eternal intereſts and the ſalvation of their ſouls.

But ſince a time will come when we ſhall be compelled to ſee and conſider thoſe things, and when it will be too late to reap any advantage from our knowledge; how much better were it for every one to do that by choice for his ſalvation and unſpeakable comfort, which at laſt he muſt do

by force, not only without benefit, but with inexpreſſible grief and remorſe!

*Whoſo is wiſe will ponder theſe things, and they ſhall underſtand the loving-kindneſs of the Lord.* Let us then be wiſe in time; let us turn from the mean and groveling purſuits of ſenſe, to think on the things that belong to our peace; let us ſtop the mad career of ſenſual pleaſure, to ſee where we are, and where our courſe will end; leſt, with the giddy multitude around us, we run headlong to our ruin. Let us examine and well conſider our paſt life, compare it with the law of God, and thereby diſcover, in order to retrieve, our many failings and miſcarriages, and, by timely and ſerious repentance, tread back the falſe ſteps we have made; that, through the merits of Jeſus Chriſt, our ſins may be blotted out, and ourſelves admitted to partake in the joy of our Lord.

SER-

# SERMON XIV.

DEUT. xxxii 6. (firſt part).

*Do ye thus requite the Lord, O fooliſh people and unwiſe?*

THE title of this chapter is a ſong of Moſes; and indeed the ſolemn invocation with which it ſets out has much the appearance of a poetical rapture. * *Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will ſpeak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.* This is, in the moſt awful and authoritative manner, demanding the attention of all created nature to what he was about to deliver. And indeed the importance of his ſubject fully juſtifies the ſolemnity of the appeal: for he proceeds to ſet forth the mercy of God to his people, and his juſt vengeance for their ingratitude. † *Is he not thy Father* (ſays the holy prophet), *who bought thee? Hath he not made thee and eſtabliſhed thee? And yet this people* ‡ *had corrupted themſelves, and were become a crooked and perverſe generation.*

* Ver. 1. † Ver. 6. ‡ Ver. 5.

Moſes

Moſes had written and ſpoken, and recapitulated the law of God to his people; he had frequently reminded them of the great things which God had done for their fathers, from the day that he called Abraham, and entered into covenant with him, till the time when he was now ſpeaking with them; which was but a little before his death, which is related in the xxxiv. chapter.

In conſequence of the divine mercies, ſhown in ſo peculiar a manner, and in ſo many inſtances to this people, Moſes had a right to expect, and to command, that they ſhould ſtedfaſtly adhere to the worſhip of God, and obediently keep all his commandments: inſtead of which, we find their hiſtory filled with murmuring at the providence, and rebellions againſt the authority of God.

No ſooner were they delivered from their bondage in Egypt than they murmured for water; and though Moſes, by the immerſion of a piece of wood into the waters of Mara, made them ſweet and fit to be uſed, they had hardly quenched their thirſt till they murmured again for bread; and when they had been miraculouſly ſupplied with manna rained from heaven, they ſtill complained and longed to return to the fleſh pots of Egypt. And when God, in compliance with their requeſt, ſent ſuch an abundance of quails among them, as

has

has never been heard of either before or ſince, ſtill they were diſcontented, and provoked the Lord to anger; ſo that *while the fleſh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled againſt the people, and the Lord ſmote the people with a very great plague*, Numb. xi. 33.

The golden calf, the rebellion of Corah, and the pollution with the Midianites, were all ſo many inſtances of wicked ingratitude, to juſtify the prophet's complaint expreſſed in this chapter, that they had corrupted themſelves, and were become a crooked and perverſe generation.

*And do ye thus* (ſays he) *requite the Lord, O fooliſh people and unwiſe?* After all that the Lord your God has done for you and your fathers; when he has ſelected you from the reſt of the world, to be a peculiar people to himſelf; given you ſuch wiſe and excellent ſtatutes and laws, both for your religious and political government, as no other nation under heaven is bleſſed with; after the numberleſs mercies he has beſtowed on you, and the ſignal and miraculous deliverances he has wrought for you, will ye yet be obſtinate and rebellious? Will ye ſtill corrupt yourſelves with idols, and forſake the God of your fathers, the Lord who bought you? *O fooliſh people and unwiſe!* What madneſs has

has infected you, thus ungratefully to requite ſo good, ſo great, ſo generous a Benefactor? All this is contained or fairly deducible from the ſtrong remonſtrance in the text: and thus were the Jews culpable in forſaking the law of their God, and degenerating into idolatry.

But while we thus blame and expoſe the degeneracy, the wickedneſs, and the ingratitude of that people, we ſhould do well to look at home, and ſeriouſly enquire whether we ourſelves are really better than they? We are certainly better inſtructed, and conſequently it might reaſonably be expected that we ſhould be better bred.

That the advantages we enjoy for doing better are ſuperior to theirs, will eaſily appear by comparing the one with the other.

When the Jews were delivered from Egypt, they had been a nation of ſlaves for four hundred years: the never-failing effect of ſuch a ſtate is a depreſſion of the mental faculties; from which free men, who have the advantage of a liberal education, are happily exempt. The conſequence of this degrading condition among them was, that their notions correſponded with their ſituation; their ſentiments were low and groveling; and their ideas entirely confined to objects of ſenſe.

From every degree of mental improvement they had

had long been cut off by the cruelty of their bondage, and the ſeverity of their taſk-maſters: in reaſon and philoſophy therefore, they were as little inſtructed, and had as little taſte, as the wildeſt ſavage.

In this humiliating poſture of their minds, nothing could afford them pleaſure, but what gratified their ſenſes and their paſſions. No wonder then, that a people ſunk in barbarous ignorance were prone to idolatry; becauſe heatheniſm was indulgent to many ſenſual gratifications, which were forbidden by the law of Moſes.

From this it was neceſſary to wean them by degrees; and therefore a law was given them well ſuited to the purpoſe: a law which, while it preſerved the fundamental principles of morality inviolate, ſuperadded a form of external worſhip of the ſame nature, yet perfectly diſtinct from any mode adopted by the heathens; on purpoſe to keep the Jews employed in fulfilling rites and ceremonies adapted to their carnal notions, and gradually preparing them for a more pure and ſpiritual revelation of God's will, when the fulneſs of time ſhould come.

The Chriſtian religion, on the contrary, was introduced into the world under circumſtances very different. The Roman arms had conquered, and thereby

thereby quieted the moſt enlightened parts of the known world; and the peaceful reign of Auguſtus had given mankind the opportunity and the leiſure neceſſary for cultivating the arts of peace*. The learning of the Greeks was tranſmitted to Rome, and thence diffuſed into the moſt diſtant provinces, of which Judea was one. Arts and ſciences were arrived at a high degree of perfection; and the popular ſuperſtitions of idolatry had in a great meaſure given way to pure and refined philoſophy.

There were numbers of people every-where, who made it their buſineſs to ſearch for truth, and examine accurately the opinions of the moſt eminent philoſophers, reſpecting the duty, the end, and the chief happineſs of a rational creature; of whom we find ſome of the moſt diſtinguiſhed among the earlieſt converts to the pure and ſpiritual religion of Chriſt. The converſion of theſe men, and their obedience to the faith, were not forced upon them by marvellous and terrific appearances of divine Majeſty; by thunders, lightnings, and earthquakes, and a voice from heaven, declarative of the infinite power and vindictive juſtice of the Almighty, ſuch as was the prelude

* Dr. Robertſon on the ſituation of the world at the time of Chriſt's appearance.

to

to the law of Moſes. Theſe men were convinced by rational and convincing arguments, ſupported by the evidence of facts which could not be diſproved.

Thoſe facts were indeed of the marvelous, and even miraculous, but by no means of the terrifying kind: they were acts of the moſt beneficent condeſcenſion and love to mankind; more calculated to excite their admiration and gratitude than any other paſſion.

Of the number who might be named in the honourable liſt of the early converts to Chriſtianity, I ſhall only mention three. *Joſeph of Arimathea, who was eminent in his nation, and member of the Sanhedrim, or great national ſenate of the Jews; Dionyſius, who held the ſame honourable rank in the Athenian Areopagus; and Flavius Clemens, a diſtinguiſhed ſenator, and afterwards conſul of Rome.

Theſe men became Chriſtians, not by terror, but by reaſon; not by the power of external authority, but by inward conviction of the mind. They had carefully examined into the truth of our Saviour's hiſtory, of his miracles, his doctrines, his precepts, and the influence which his religion had upon the lives of his diſciples and followers;

* See Addiſon's Evidences.

and were by the whole perſuaded to profeſs their belief in him, though, by ſuch profeſſion, they knew that they muſt bid adieu to all worldly honours and advantages: and all three ſuffered perſecution, and even martyrdom, rather than renounce the faith, or ſo much as temporize with their perſecutors.

In the farther progreſs of the Jewiſh religion, we find it ſtill carried on with a ſeverity of diſcipline ſuited to the character and genius of its profeſſors; by formal rites and ceremonies, tedious and unedifying in their nature, and in their effects no way ſuited to improve the knowledge or the ſentiments of thoſe who performed them, even with the moſt punctual exactneſs and the greateſt poſſible attention*.

Chriſtianity, on the contrary, proceeded in its gentle and modeſt courſe; not by a ſevere and penal code to enforce it, but by mildneſs and condeſcenſion; not by tireſome ceremonies, expenſive ſacrifices, or formal and unintereſting purifications and ablutions; but by a pure and holy adoration, a devotion of the ſoul to God, a worſhip in ſpirit and in truth.

The morality of the goſpel is alſo greatly ſuperior to any ſyſtem of morals taught before the

* Heb. x. 1.

coming

coming of our Lord. I need not mention the codes of Minos, Lycurgus, or Solon; they are not fit to be brought into compariſon: but even that of Moſes looks fading and languid, when compared with the complete and perfect body of ethics, founded on the love of God and our neighbour, delivered in ſuch elegant and comprehenſive language in the goſpel. Of this many proofs might be adduced, to ſhow the mighty difference in favour of the Chriſtian morality; which I ſhould feel it incumbent on me now to mention, but that it has been ſo much better done already by our Lord himſelf, in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew's goſpel, ver. 21. and following verſes.

If we proceed to examine the ſanctions of both religions, we ſhall find the difference in favour of Chriſtianity no leſs remarkable than under the particulars already mentioned.

The Jews were threatened with temporal judgments, in caſe of diſobedience; ſuch as famine, war, peſtilence, poverty, bondage, diſeaſes, and ſundry kinds of death: and as theſe were the only puniſhments denounced againſt vice and wickedneſs, ſo the rewards annexed to the obedience which their law required, were contraſted in due proportion to thoſe inflictions: plenty, peace, health, riches, freedom, long life, and the poſſeſſion

of

of a land productive of all theſe advantages. But theſe were rewards and puniſhments ſuited only to the preſent ſtate of things, affecting the mortal and inferior part of man, and inadequate to the higher powers of our nature, and the dignity of cultivated reaſon.

The ſanctions of our religion, on the contrary, are applied to the rational faculties only: it requires a reaſonable ſervice from its votaries, and that upon rational and equitable motives. No duty is preſcribed, no vice forbidden; but the moſt improved and exalted reaſon muſt approve both the prohibition and the command. Thus we are treated more honourably; not like ſervants in the family of our Lord, but as children. The maſter of a family, like the Centurion in the goſpel, ſays to his ſervant, Do this, and he doth it: he does not think himſelf bound to tell him the motives of his commands, though the near relation of the parties, and the tender affection in which parents are ſeldom if ever deficient, will induce him to explain them to his children.

Thus the Jews were commanded to obey the law of Moſes, with the ſtern condition of, Do this, and live; which clearly implies the converſe, If thou do it not, thou ſhalt die. Chriſtians are invited to the obedience of the goſpel, by every endearing

dearing motive that can be ſuppoſed to act upon a reaſonable mind. And if the purity and perfection of its precepts may be ſuppoſed to exceed the abilities of our fallen nature, the Holy Spirit of God is promiſed to them that aſk it; and, after all, the gracious pardon of our lapſes is aſſured to our ſincere repentance, through the merits of a Redeemer, who died and roſe again, and aſcended into heaven to procure it for us.

The ſuperior knowledge we derive from Chriſt's religion, reſpecting the will of God, and the ends and iſſues of our own actions; the certainty of the reſurrection of our bodies, and the life and immortality brought to light by the goſpel; theſe are the glorious privileges which none but the Son of God ever did or could reveal, becauſe none but he was able to procure, and conſequently to communicate them.

To ſum up the whole in few words: the Jews were awed into obedience by inſtances of almighty and terrific power; we are invited to duty by acts of the moſt endearing condeſcenſion and kindneſs. Their worſhip was ſervile, laborious, and unedifying; ours is rational, ſimple, and inſtructive. Their ceremonies and ſacrifices were the ſhadows of good things to come; to our happier lot thoſe good things themſelves are fallen.

We

We live not under the ſhade of myſtical types, and alluſive repreſentations of things to be hereafter cleared up; the ſun of righteouſneſs hath ariſen, and diſpelled the cloud that obſcured the benighted world; and in his light we clearly ſee the way to everlaſting life.

By this time I hope it plainly appears, that the advantages we enjoy, and the means we poſſeſs of well-doing, are much ſuperior to thoſe vouchſafed to the Jews: the natural inference from which is, that we ought to do better than they.

Is this then the caſe? Are we in this reſpect better than they? If we be, or if it be ſaid that we are, I would aſk whence comes that ſpirit of infidelity, or that woeful indifference and luke-warmneſs in religion, or that general (I had almoſt ſaid univerſal) looſeneſs of principles and depravity of manners, among profeſſing Chriſtians, which the moſt ſuperficial obſerver muſt ſee, and all good men cannot but lament in the world?

But it will perhaps be contended, that if we are leſs outwardly pious, we are at leaſt more honeſt, and leſs given to fraud and impoſition than the Jews were. If this be the caſe, why is it that we cannot truſt one another? That in driving a bargain, one is ſo ready to impoſe either on the ignorance or credulity of the other; and that, after all,

all, the word of a Chriſtian is not ſufficient to bind him; but there muſt be bills, and bonds, and legal inſtruments to make men true to their promiſes and obligations?

Theſe are ſad but undeniable proofs of the degeneracy of our nature; of our proneneſs to forget the mercies we receive, and requite them with ingratitude. Nor is the evil by any means confined to the ignorant and unlearned. The very ſeminaries of education, and the poliſhed circles of refined life, are contaminated with the poiſon; and too too often is the breath of what paſſes for politeneſs, nothing more than the peſtilential blaſt of ſpecious infection.

How few ſocieties do we meet with, in which the converſation tends to improve either the principles or the morals of the company? The venerable form of religion is kept always in the back ground, and what little of it remains with the generality, is confined to the church, where they appear but ſeldom, or to their cloſets where none can follow or obſerve them.

Do we then thus requite the Lord that bought us? that hath redeemed us from a bondage worſe than that of Egypt, the ſlavery of ſin and ſatan? After all that our bleſſed Lord has done and ſuffered to ſave us, ſhall we madly forſake ſuch a Benefactor,

factor, and run upon our own inevitable deſtruction? The folly of ſuch a conduct requires but little to expoſe it, to thoſe who know, that though to his pious and obedient children God is gracious and merciful, ſlow to anger and of great kindneſs; that he is ready to receive and pardon ſinners, when they return to him and their duty; yet for them who are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs, there remain tribulation and wrath, the dreadful inflictions of divine vengeance, which no force can reſiſt, nor cunning evade. *For* * *thoſe* (ſays Chriſt), *mine enemies, who would not that I ſhould rule over them, bring hither and ſlay them before me.*

Surely, my brethren, we who are Chriſtians, who are bleſt with the knowledge of the beſt ſcheme of religion that ever was publiſhed to the world, and are ſo much better inſtructed than any other people ever were; we, I ſay, have the utmoſt reaſon to look well to our behaviour, and to be more religious than others; by how much more glorious and certain the rewards of virtue are to us than they were, or could be to any people exiſting, before the coming of our Lord. If we are not, we may expect even heathens as well as Jews to riſe up in judgment with us, and condemn us:

* Luke xix. 27.

and

and may look for a ſeverer doom than theirs, in proportion to the ſuperiority of our advantages: for to this purpoſe argues the apoſtle to the Hebrews. * *If* (ſays he) *the word ſpoken by angels was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received a juſt recompence of reward; how ſhall we eſcape if we neglect ſo great ſalvation, which at the firſt began to be ſpoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?*

But if we be truly religious, according to the helps, advantages, and opportunities we have for being ſo, we have promiſe of this life, and that which is to come. Here in this life, we ſhall enjoy a ſafe and quiet conſcience, and that peace with God which the things of the world can neither give nor take away; and in the life to come, ſuch an eternity of happineſs, as, being far above all our moſt exalted conceptions, muſt alſo exceed our moſt ſanguine hopes and wiſhes.

* Heb. ii. 2, 3.

# SERMON XV.

2 CORINTH. iii. 17. (latter part).

*And where the ſpirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

THE great object of human deſire is happineſs. This is implanted in our frame by the all-wiſe Author of our being, as the firſt and leading principle of all our actions; and therefore to deprive us of it, were to change our nature, and render us inſenſible to all the beſt and nobleſt feelings of humanity.

The fatigue of labour, the toil of ſtudy, the dangers of warfare, the hazards of trade and commerce, are all undertaken with this view; all undergone with the hope, that by being purſued with care and induſtry for the preſent, a time will come, when our application ſhall be rewarded with a proportional degree of happineſs and pleaſure; when freedom and eaſe in declining life, ſhall repay the attention of youth; when the pains we beſtow, and the care we take, during the earlier

part

part of life, ſhall be ſucceeded by an exemption from care and labour of every kind.

It is true, that the ingredients of human felicity are various, according to the humours, taſtes, and diſpoſitions of mankind: but, however widely men may differ from each other in their ſchemes of happineſs, one article ſeems indiſpenſable in them all, that is liberty; for let a man's circumſtances in other reſpects be what they will, yet the want of liberty will throw ſuch a damp upon all his enjoyments, as hardly any thing conſiſtent with our ſituation in this life can compenſate.

The grandee, whoſe fate is dependant on his tyrant's nod, and the ſlave who tugs at the oar to which he is chained, pant alike for liberty; and as the one would gladly purchaſe the bleſſing with all the accumulated advantages of wealth, rank, and office, ſo would the other willingly procure it at the manifeſt hazard of life itſelf.

What I have hitherto ſaid relates to perſonal liberty, by which I mean, the power of doing or forbearing any action, as it may appear agreeable or diſpleaſing to ourſelves, without the check or controul of any other.

I ſhall not now ſtay to define the ſeveral degrees of this liberty, which may be uſeful, or can be tolerated, in different conſtitutions or forms of civil

civil ſociety, but proceed to the conſideration of that mental or ſpiritual liberty, which, though in the preſent depraved ſtate of human nature, not ſo generally attended to, or ſo eagerly ſought after, is yet of infinitely greater importance to a rational mind, than either the eaſe of our perſons or the freedom of our actions. This is to be found in the religion of Chriſt, and there only. *Where the ſpirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

This expreſſion naturally implies, that where this divine Spirit has no place, there is bondage. It may therefore be no improper employment of our preſent meditations, to conſider the nature of that bondage, and the inſtances of ſlavery from which believers in Chriſt are by his religion ſet free; by which we may ſee the excellence and proper uſe of true Chriſtian liberty.

When we conſider man as a rational being, we can hardly conceive it poſſible for him to exiſt without ſome idea of religion. Whenever we open our eyes and look about us, we muſt perceive a great variety of objects actually exiſting, of whoſe production we can give no ſatisfactory account: we can however eaſily ſee the impoſſibility of their having produced themſelves; and our reaſoning upon this perception naturally carries our thoughts to ſome ſuperior Agent, ſome great firſt Cauſe, the

Author

Author of their being and our own, whoſe power muſt be infinite, and whoſe exiſtence neceſſary and perpetual.

The conſideration of this wonderful Being, together with the admiration, love, and reverence we feel for ſuch attributes of his nature as reaſon can diſcover, conſtitute what is properly and ſtrictly called natural religion; without which a reaſonable, inquiſitive, and uncorrupted mind cannot exiſt.

I do not here ſpeak of the refinements of falſe philoſophy, which obſcure the underſtanding, and bewilder the judgment; but of ſound, impartial, natural reaſon, whoſe buſineſs is to aſſociate and compare the genuine perceptions of the mind, and form ſuch concluſions as that aſſociation and compariſon ſuggeſt to an unprejudiced and well-diſpoſed inquirer. And I maintain, that to ſuch the worſhip of one true and living God is both natural and agreeable.

And thus it was with man when in the ſtate of innocence he adored his Creator; while virtue, undiſturbed by paſſion, preſerved him from extravagance of fancy, and gratitude excited his praiſe and obedience to the beneficent Author of his enjoyments.

But when ſin entered into the world, and debaſed

baſed the faculties of the ſoul, paſſion uſurped the government of the mind, and reaſon, dethroned as it were, from her natural and proper ſeat in the ſoul, became too weak to ſtem the torrent of general corruption. Hence, not only kings and heroes, men who, by any memorable exploits or uſeful inventions, had diſtinguiſhed themſelves from the vulgar, but all the wildeſt fancies, the paſſions, and even the vices of men, were made the objects of popular adoration. Rites too and ceremonies were inſtituted for the worſhip of theſe artificial divinities, tireſome, tedious, and expenſive, repugnant to reaſon, and ſhocking to humanity.

To ſay nothing of the hecatombs of the heathens*, their tedious proceſſions, expenſive games, and extravagant public ſhows, in honour of their gods; their ſubjects, ſervants, nay their very children, were frequently butchered or burnt, either to conciliate the favour, or deprecate the wrath of theſe pretended deities.

Thus their worſhip became a reproach to reaſon, and the ſmall remains of natural religion, not carried away by the tide of general depravity, ſickened at the ſight of altars drenched in human blood, and temples filled with riot and intemperance. From this degrading condition of

* Sacrifices conſiſting of an hundred oxen or bulls.

our

our nature, this worſe than Egyptian bondage, Chriſt hath in mercy ſet us free, and proved, by the compariſon, the mighty bleſſings of the gracious change.

No longer ſubjected to the dominion of thoſe many lords, whoſe tyranny kept the heathen world in bondage; no longer carried away to dumb idols, nor led by the craft of prieſts to error and ſuperſtition; we are taught by our bleſſed Redeemer, our glorious Deliverer, to adore one only living and true God; to whom the moſt acceptable ſacrifice we can offer, is a broken and contrite heart*, and whoſe worſhip is in ſpirit and in truth: that ſpirit wherein is liberty; *that truth which maketh all believers free*†.

Nor is it only from the bondage of heathen ſuperſtition and idolatry that we are delivered by the religion of Chriſt; he hath alſo relieved us from the ſervitude of Jewiſh ordinances and ceremonies, that grievous and intolerable yoke, which St. Peter obſerves, neither the men of his time nor their fathers were able to bear.

The Jews, at the time of their deliverance from Egypt, were an ignorant, low, and groveling people, the natural effect of long and ſevere bondage; and conſequently they were not in a proper diſ-

* Pſalm li. 17. † John viii. 32.

poſition,

poſition, nor ſufficiently prepared, to have a pure and ſpiritual religion taught them. The ſeverity of their taſk-maſters left them no time for the improvement of their minds, either in religion or philoſophy; and the conſequence was, as it will always be in ſimilar circumſtances, their ſentiments were depraved and their notions contracted, in ſo much, that ſuch a ſyſtem and its principles preached to them, could have met with no attention, nor even been underſtood. God therefore in condeſcenſion to their ignorance, and to the unteachable hardneſs of heart which ignorance is apt to beget, gave them a law ſuited to the genius of a people in their condition; a law full of bodily exerciſes, and tedious unintereſting ordinances; a law well adapted to preſerve ſuch a people from idolatry, to which they were much addicted, and of which they had probably imbibed the principles during their ſtay in Egypt; a law, however, compoſed of the types and ſhadows of better things to come, and of which the moſt exact and ſcrupulous obſervance could never make the comers thereunto perfect: but whoſe ſacrifices and ſolemn ſervice were chiefly intended to typify and point out the ſacrifice of the death of Chriſt; that ſacrifice of greateſt value in the ſight of God, and for their reference to which alone the others were of any value at all.

But

But when the fulneſs of time was come, and the world, by the operation of Divine Providence, was duly prepared to receive the goſpel, God ſent forth his Son, to declare to mankind the way of truth and life everlaſting; to take away the uſe of bodily and unprofitable exerciſes, the ſlavery of oblations, purifications, and ablutions; * *to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening the priſon to them that are bound; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord;* to redeem us from the degrading bondage of the law of ordinances, and convince us, by the purity of his doctrines, and the conformity of his precepts to our beſt and moſt cultivated reaſon, that he has conferred on us the moſt ſubſtantial liberty, and that his ſervice is indeed the moſt perfect freedom †.

III. The religion of Chriſt has delivered all true believers in him from that ſervile and narrow principle of worldly mindedneſs, ſo evidently conſiſtent with all other ſyſtems of religion.

By opening our proſpects to a future life, he has taught us, not to eſtimate the things of this world above their real value; but to refuſe, nay even to deſpiſe, every advantage of the preſent life, when offered upon terms inconſiſtent with the intereſts of a better.

* Iſaiah lxi. 1. † Morn. Collect.

The true Chriſtian values the things of the world, only as they procure him a comfortable ſubſiſtence for himſelf, and thoſe whom providence has placed in a ſituation of dependence upon him, and of doing good to others at every fit opportunity, and in proportion as God hath enabled him ſo to do; and ſenſible as he muſt be, that they do not conſtitute his chief good, he uſes them ſo as to render them inſtruments under God to promote it.

Here then we ſee the excellence and uſe of true Chriſtian liberty.

We have heard of late ſuch notions of liberty, propagated by ſome, as have induced thoſe who were led by their opinions, to reſiſt, and even overthrow, the lawful government of their country; to throw off all the reſtraints of reaſon, religion, and national authority, and introduce univerſal confuſion, anarchy, and the moſt unbridled licentiouſneſs: but how different is this from that liberty with which Chriſt has made us free. He who taught his followers to pay tribute to Cæſar, and performed a miracle to ſatisfy the demand, can never be ſuppoſed to teach or countenance rebellion againſt lawful governors, or diſobedience to their juſt commands. No; the genuine diſciple of the holy Jeſus, in whom the Spirit of the Lord is, though he be true to the intereſts of his country,

try, will never diſturb the peace of ſociety; though he may be ready to ſhed his blood in the defence of his native rights, yet will he never invade the right of another. Such a man will, on the contrary, ſtudy to be quiet, and to do his own buſineſs: he will be induſtrious in his calling, but he will not be covetous; he will be frugal, not penurious; prudent, not ſordid; cautious, without being ſuſpicious; without being rigid, he will be ſtrictly juſt; and though he may uſe both ſkill and prudence in his dealings, yet he will never impoſe upon the ignorant, or over-reach the weak. If he be poor, he will be humble; if rich, he will be thankful; if honours court, they cannot puff him up; and if riches increaſe, he is too wiſe to ſet his heart upon them. In a word, the true believer, the real diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt, will, at all times, and in every ſituation, ſo uſe this world as not to abuſe it; and knowing, as he muſt needs do, that it is not his proper and final home, but only a paſſage to and a preparation for it, the pleaſures, pains, advantages, and cares of life, will ſit comparatively eaſy on him; and his chief concern will be to maintain a conſcience void of offence towards God and man, and ſo to paſs through things temporal, as to ſecure him from finally loſing thoſe which are eternal. Such a happy diſpoſition

poſition of mind will procure him that liberty and happineſs which ſordid and worldly minds are for ever purſuing in vain; will ſoothe and conſole him in the day of adverſity, and heighten the reliſh of every pleaſure which life affords; and when he comes to paſs through the valley of the ſhadow of death, to leave the world with all its cares and its concerns behind him, the purity and uprightneſs of his life will cheer him in the gloomy paſſage, at the end of which he will enter into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God.

SER-

# SERMON XVI.

[Preached on the 8th March 1798, being a public Faſt.]

ISAIAH lviii. 6, 7.

*Is not this the faſt that I have choſen? to looſe the bands of wickedneſs, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppreſſed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are caſt out to thy houſe? when thou ſeeſt the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyſelf from thine own fleſh?*

IN the former part of this chapter, we find the Jews complaining of thoſe public evils which they ſuffered as a people, notwithſtanding their adherence to the true religion of God, and their ſtrict obſervance of the ceremonies and inſtitutions of his law; and even expoſtulating with him, as if by ſuffering ſuch calamities to come upon them, he had forfeited his veracity, and come ſhort of the promiſes which himſelf had annexed to the performance

formance of his law. For whereas the Lord had* promiſed, that while they continued ſtedfaſt in their obedience, they ſhould alſo continue a flouriſhing and proſperous people; they complain in the third verſe of this chapter, that this promiſe ſeems to be forgotten on God's part. *Wherefore* (ſay they) *have we faſted, and thou ſeeſt not? Wherefore have we afflicted our ſoul, and thou takeſt no knowledge?* The reaſon is however aſſigned by the prophet in the ſame and the following verſe: *Behold in the day of your faſt ye find pleaſure, and exact all your labours. Behold ye faſt for ſtrife and debate, and to ſmite with the fiſt of wickedneſs.* The prophet proceeds to reproach them with their wickedneſs and hypocriſy, by telling them that God had rather they ſhould not faſt at all, than to do it from ſuch baſe and unworthy motives. *Ye ſhall not faſt* (ſays he) *as ye do this day, to make your voices be heard on high.*

Their manner was, to cover themſelves with ſackcloth, to ſprinkle their heads with aſhes, and to look and walk with folded hands and down-caſt looks; to make a great ſhow of grief and mortification, and even to lift up their voices to weep and howl, and afflict themſelves: but all this, as our Saviour told thoſe of his time, that they might

* Deut. v. 32, 33. inter alia.

be

be ſeen of men, and gain the popular reputation of ſingular devotion and piety: yet, on thoſe days of apparent humiliation, they exacted all their labours, they made their cattle and ſervants work on their moſt ſolemn faſts, juſt as on ordinary days; they appeared to mourn for their ſins, but they would not forego one article in thoſe things that affected their worldly intereſt. Covetouſneſs mingled even with their devotion, they could diſpute, wrangle, and even fight and ſmite with the fiſt of wickedneſs, as the prophet tells them, even while they pretended to be engaged in the moſt ſolemn exerciſes of religion.

For theſe reaſons the prophet is commanded to cry aloud, and ſpare not to ſhew their ſin. *Is this* (ſays he) *the faſt that I have deſired? A day for a man to afflict his ſoul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulruſh, to ſpread ſackcloth and aſhes under him? Wilt thou call this a faſt, an acceptable day to the Lord?* And indeed how could it be imagined, that God could accept of their devotions, while their hearts were engaged in worldly and mercenary purſuits, and their public prayers and faſtings uſed only as a cloak for their guile and hypocriſy? Therefore he tells them by his prophet, in the words of our text, what they were to do in order to render their ſervices acceptable to

God,

God, and procure to themſelves his promiſed bleſſings, *viz. to break the bands of wickedneſs, and to let the oppreſſed go free*, &c.

In order fully to underſtand the directions here given by the prophet, it may not be amiſs to recollect what has been ſaid by their hiſtorian Joſephus; who tells us, that many of the Jews at this time were, as they are now, dealers in and lenders of money.

For loans of this kind they uſed to require exorbitant intereſt, according to the diſtreſs or neceſſities of the borrower; and when, by means of theſe exactions, the debt amounted to a ſum beyond the power of the debtor to diſcharge, they ſeized his goods; and if theſe were ſtill unequal to the demand, his perſon was ſold into bondage, till the price of his labour amounted to the utmoſt that the creditor could demand. Nay, in this manner, whole families had been reduced to ſlavery, and even the children born in ſervitude could ſcarce become free. Now the bonds and other deeds, by which the richer ſort among the Jews became poſſeſſed of the houſes, eſtates, goods, and perſons of their poorer brethren, ſeem to me to be thoſe bands of wickedneſs which the Lord commands them to looſe: for the poor debtors were entangled in them, by the wicked extortion and avarice of the

the monied men; who, by furniſhing them gradually with ſmall ſums to relieve their preſent neceſſities, wormed them out of their little eſtates, and brought them under the yoke of ſlavery, where we may be ſure their burden was at leaſt as heavy as they were able to bear.

Now it is certainly very reaſonable in all caſes, that a man ſhould pay the debts he has contracted; nothing can be more juſt, nothing more agreeable to all our notions of equity; and therefore nothing is more explicitly commanded than this is, both by the laws of God and man. But God, who hath commanded us to do juſtice, requires us alſo to love mercy; and if mercy were not to accompany the juſtice of God to man, what muſt become of the whole race of Adam, who are ſo deeply debtors to him? Debtors did I ſay? Inſolvent bankrupts; the traitors to his goodneſs, and rebels againſt his authority.

We may then ſuppoſe the words of the prophet to be well underſtood by thoſe to whom they were ſpoken, as no way repugnant to the rules of equity and fair dealing; and are as if the Lord had ſaid, If ye expect to move me to compaſſion by your faſts, then do you ſhow pity to your unfortunate brethren, whoſe houſes and lands you have ſwallowed up, in exchange for a few trifling ſums which

you lent them in their extreme neceſſity. Cancel thoſe wicked bonds by which you claim a right to theſe eſtates. Releaſe them from the burden of thoſe debts, by which you grind the faces of the poor, without their having ever received an adequate conſideration. Reſtore their children from that hard condition of ſlavery, to which you have reduced them, to that freedom in which they were born, and which it is my will they ſhould ſtill enjoy. Likewiſe, let the ſervants, who are by law or otherwiſe bound to you, enjoy the benefit of the ſabbaths and faſts which I have ordained; and do not oblige them to hard labour in your fields or houſes, when they ought to be employed in my ſervice and the duties of religion.

This, in our profuſe way of ſpeaking, I take to be the ſenſe of the prophet's words in our text. *To looſe the bands of wickedneſs, to undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppreſſed go free, and that ye break every yoke.* And a moſt reaſonable command it was to thoſe to whom it was directed. But as that which was written aforetime was written for our admonition, let us now endeavour to apply the inſtruction it contains to ourſelves.

We are here aſſembled this day, by royal authority, to bewail our ſins as a nation, and the public misfortunes which we feel in conſequence of them,

them, and to pray for the divine bleſſing on our fleets and armies, that God may give them ſucceſs againſt a cruel and relentleſs enemy; whoſe object is no longer confined to extent of territory, commercial advantage, or political ſuperiority; but whoſe declared purpoſe is to overturn our government, abrogate our laws, deſtroy that conſtitution which has ſo long been the admiration of the world, and extinguiſh the holy religion by which we hope to be ſaved.

It is neither my buſineſs nor inclination to decide political diſputes in this place: but whatever may be the opinion of any one reſpecting the origin of the preſent conteſt, the ſituation to which the contending powers are now brought, calls aloud for every poſſible exertion, to reſiſt the rapacious and cruel deſigns of ſuch inhuman and ſanguinary foes. But little need be ſaid by way of exhortation, where the ſentiments of all are the ſame; and no argument is neceſſary, where there is no difference of opinion: I ſhall add no more therefore on this ſubject, but proceed to ſuch conſiderations as are more immediately ſuggeſted by the words of our text.

We ſee here, then, that the words are directed to a people who were guilty of the abominable crimes of cruelty to their debtors, ſeverity to their

ſervants,

ſervants, and uſury in their pecuniary and commercial dealings; and therefore God tells them by his prophet, that, while they perſiſted in ſuch wicked practices, their faſts were no better than a ſolemn mockery, and would be ſo treated by him.

Of the particular crimes here charged to the account of the Jews, I truſt that all who now hear me are innocent. I would fain hope, that ye have ſo learned Chriſt, that cruelty and oppreſſion, extortion and uſury, find no place among you. But there are other ſins, and thoſe very heinous too, perfectly conſiſtent with a total exemption from theſe. And would to God I could ſay that none of them were to be found in our country.

Let us then ſeriouſly examine ourſelves, reſpecting thoſe ſins in our land which cry aloud for reformation, and ſee whether we ourſelves may not be cenſurable for our own ſhare of them, even while we think ourſelves exempted from the charge. This is a proper employment for a day of national humiliation and faſting; and therefore that ye may the better perform this duty, take a view of your own lives; examine the ſentiments of your hearts, and ſee how they agree with or differ from the commandments of God.

For inſtance, were I to tax you with idolatry, in worſhipping

worſhipping either a falſe god, or the true one under the form of a falſe idol, you would be ſhocked. You would ſay, Surely this man is cruel and unjuſt in his aſſertion: God forbid that we ſhould worſhip any deity but himſelf, or ever bow the knee to an idol, the work of men's hands! But, my brethren, if we profeſs to worſhip the true God, do we love him as we ought, and are commanded, with all our heart, and ſoul, and mind, and ſtrength? Alas, no! Every creature he has made becomes his rival in our affections; and too often are ſome of the worſt of them permitted to ſupplant him in our eſteem. The world has the unhappy advantage of pre-engaging our paſſions, of furniſhing us with the firſt ſentiments of pleaſure, at a time when we have not reflection enough to trace out cauſes from their effects, or to look beyond the inſtrument to the hand whoſe direction it obeys. And when we arrive at a maturity in reaſon ſufficient for the diſcovery, we are hardly perſuaded to part with the deluſion: for we are already enamoured of the creatures, and forget the bountiful hand that beſtows them, and to whom alone our love and gratitude are due for all the agreeable ſenſations they produce.

Thus do we inſenſibly treſpaſs under the firſt and ſecond commandments; and, while we profeſs

feſs to worſhip the true God, and ſerve him only, we ſet up our idols in our hearts, and put the ſtumbling block of our iniquity before our face: much like the fiſhermen, of whom we read in ancient fables, who refuſed to worſhip Neptune, but offered ſacrifice to their own net.

If, in our ſelf-examination, we proceed to the third commandment, we may perhaps expect a better account. Surely, ſays every one, I honour and reverence the holy name of God. But if you do, whence comes it that I can ſo ſeldom paſs through the ſtreets without hearing it blaſphemed? I may perhaps be told, that this can only be from the loweſt and worſt dregs of the people; from ſome peculiarly profligate and abandoned characters: and from my ſoul do I wiſh that this were true. But it is notorious, that men whoſe ſituation in life ſhould render their example more worthy of imitation, are too often more flagrantly guilty of this offenſive and daring profanation than their inferiors. How often do we hear the moſt trifling converſation, and even ſuch as would otherwiſe be agreeable and entertaining, mingled with ſuch oaths and imprecations as muſt come under the guilt of taking God's name in vain? But beſides theſe groſſer offences, * "all indecent and

* Secker.

"unfit

" unfit uſe of God's name in our diſcourſe, though " it be not in ſwearing and curſing, comes within " the prohibition of this commandment. All irre- " verent ſayings, concerning his nature and attri- " butes, his providence, and his commands, fall " under the ſame guilt."

Were I to purſue this ſcrutiny through the whole decalogue, what a number of blemiſhes would appear! For in many things we offend all; and when we talk of the ſins of the nation at large, we ought to remember that nations are made up of individuals, and that it is the duty of every one to reform one; and if this were done by all, the nation would be reformed of courſe.

By the ſample I have given, you may try the reſt. This I would earneſtly recommend; that, ſeeing wherein ye have failed, and come ſhort of your duty, ye may ſee alſo wherein your amendment muſt conſiſt, and for what ſins ye have need to repent. This I ſay is the proper buſineſs of a faſt day; and if all would thus employ ſuch days, and order their lives ſo as to bring forth the proper fruits of ſuch their penitence, no doubt our faſts and prayers would meet with a merciful acceptance at the throne of grace.

Remember the caſe of the Ninevites; who, at the preaching of Jonah, humbled themſelves before

fore the Lord, and thereby procured the divine forgiveneſs: remember too, that God is the ſame God now that he was then: the God that loveth righteouſneſs and hateth iniquity: a God who has promiſed to receive his prodigal children, when they return to him, and ſeek to the riches of their father's houſe: who, if we turn from the evil of our way; if we ceaſe to do evil, and learn to do well; if we relieve the oppreſſed, deal our bread to the hungry; if we viſit the poor, cover the naked, and deſpiſe not our brother, which is our own fleſh; * *then ſhalt thou call* (ſays the prophet), *and the Lord ſhall anſwer; thou ſhalt cry, and he will ſay, Here am I:* he will hear our prayers as he did thoſe of the Ninevites, and ſpare our country as he did their city. He will ſave and defend us from the malice and rage of our cruel and inveterate foes, and grant us the bleſſing of peace at the laſt, in ſpite of all their wicked machinations.

* Iſaiah lviii. 9.

SER-

# SERMON XVII.

1 THESSALON. ii. 4.

*But as we were allowed of God to be put in truſt with the goſpel, even ſo we ſpeak, not as pleaſing men, but God which trieth our hearts.*

THE apoſtle of our text, writing to the Corinthians*, deſires that he and his brethren, the other apoſtles, may be accounted as ſtewards of the myſteries of God; and here he tells the Theſſalonians, that they were put in truſt with the goſpel.

Theſe terms convey but one meaning; for what is a ſteward but a man in truſt? And accordingly the apoſtle adds, *Moreover, in ſtewards it is required that a man be found faithful.* The great requiſite then for ſuch a ſtation is fidelity. But ſuch and ſo various are the purſuits of men, ſo different their ſentiments and opinions, that it is difficult to give them that ſatisfaction which a faithful diſcharge of duty has a right to expect ſhould follow it.

* 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2.

The miniſters of the goſpel are indeed more eminently required to be faithful, in fulfilling the duties of their office, becauſe their truſt is the greateſt, their charge the moſt valuable, that can be committed to men; namely, the care of Chriſt's own myſtical body, the church: the care, I ſay, of teaching the doctrines, enforcing the precepts, and performing the offices of his religion; and taking every method in their power to promote the intereſts of his kingdom upon earth. But this, though in a particular manner belonging to the ſacred profeſſion, is by no means peculiar to it. Every man has his own talent committed to him, of which he is juſtly expected to give a faithful account: but as this account is to be rendered only to God, I would earneſtly recommend to every one the example of the apoſtle in our text; namely to ſpeak and act not as pleaſing men, but God which trieth our hearts.

But while I recommend this as the beſt rule of a Chriſtian's conduct, I would not be thought to inſinuate, that we are never upon any account, or upon any occaſion, to pleaſe men, nor would the apoſtle of our text bear me out in any ſuch aſſertion: for in other parts of his epiſtles, he is very ſtrenuous in adviſing his converts to ſuch a conduct, as ſhould make them and their religion agreeable to all men.

men. Thus, in the firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians, chap. x. 32, 33. *Give none offence to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:* and to enforce this ſalutary advice, he ſets before them his own example; *even* (ſays he) *as I pleaſe all men in all things.*

What, therefore, he declares in this place, muſt be underſtood with ſome limitations; and it may be of uſe to us to conſider what thoſe limitations are; not ſo much for juſtifying the conduct of the apoſtle, as to regulate our own.

For this purpoſe I muſt obſerve to you, that when the apoſtle ſays that they ſpoke not as pleaſing men but God, he muſt be underſtood as ſpeaking in a figure common and well-known in the language in which he wrote, and frequently uſed in ſcripture, to expreſs a preference or ſuperior excellence of one thing above another.

Thus God declares by the prophet Hoſea, chap. vi. 6. *I deſired mercy, and not ſacrifice.* This paſſage is quoted by our Lord, in the goſpel of St. Matthew*, on two different occaſions, in the ſame words; in all which places it muſt be underſtood as giving only a preference to works of mercy above ſacrifice; ſince we know that both were commanded by God, and therefore each was a duty.

* Chap. ix. 13. and chap. xii. 7.

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This expreſſion, therefore, correſponds directly with that of Samuel to Saul. *Behold to obey is better than ſacrifice; and to hearken than the fat of rams**.

The apoſtle, therefore, muſt be underſtood as only preferring the pleaſure of God to that of men; and in this certainly his example is highly deſerving of our imitation.

But as we are ſent into the world to live for a time among men, and Chriſtian charity commands us to do all we can for promoting their happineſs, and conſequently to give them pleaſure, we have only to conſider how far and in what reſpects this may be done, conſiſtently with having it always in view, that pleaſing God is ſtill a ſuperior and preferable duty.

Pleaſure, conſidered in the abſtract, is ſo far from being ſinful, that the higheſt poſſible degree of it is what we are taught to look for, as the reward of our virtue in the enjoyment of God to all eternity: †for in his preſence is fulneſs of joy, and at his right hand pleaſures for ever more.

God has implanted in our ſouls a natural deſire of pleaſure; which, therefore, we muſt in ſome inſtances be permitted to gratify, becauſe otherwiſe this deſire would be implanted in vain: con-

* 1 Sam. xv. 22. † Pſalm xvi. 11.

ſequently,

ſequently, to be pleaſed ſimply is not always ſinful; but its guilt or innocence depends on its cauſes, occaſions, and circumſtances. If an action is in itſelf lawful, its being agreeable or giving pleaſure cannot make it ſinful; and, on the other hand, whatever is in its nature ſinful cannot be made lawful by any pleaſure which it gives, either to ourſelves or others.

Now this rule will juſtify us in the uſe of all innocent methods of pleaſing each other: we may for inſtance comply with ſuch modes and faſhions as cuſtom and public taſte have eſtabliſhed where we live; we may make ourſelves agreeable to thoſe we converſe with, by civil and obliging diſcourſe and behaviour; we may divert their imagination by the pleaſure ariſing from harmleſs wit and innocent mirth; and much more, feed their minds with delightful and inſtructive truths: in ſhort, we may promote any unforbidden pleaſure to ourſelves or others, without meriting the imputation of pleaſing men ſo as to diſpleaſe God who trieth our hearts.

But ſtill the pleaſures of men muſt be circumſcribed within certain limits, beyond which they muſt not paſs; or, if they do, they become unlawful, and conſequently neceſſary to be reſtrained: for not the will of man, but that of God, is the

proper

proper meaſure of our enjoyment. We muſt not therefore pleaſe men by doing evil: evil to them or to ourſelves; any thing dangerous to their ſalvation, or our own.

1ſt, It is the height of folly to be pleaſed with any thing that tends to our ruin; and of cruelty, to gratify others at the expence of their eternal ſalvation. It would be doing a very bad office if a man ſhould perſuade his friend to ſwallow a draught of deadly poiſon, becauſe it was agreeable to his palate. By ſuch vicious perſuaſion, the ſerpent firſt tempted Eve to taſte the forbidden fruit; who, when ſhe had ſo done, and found it pleaſant to the taſte, willing to communicate the ſame pleaſure to her huſband, adminiſtered ruin and death to him and all his poſterity.

Of the ſame fatal treachery are all thoſe inſtruments of ſatan guilty, who inſtruct raw and unpractiſed ſinners in the ways of vice; bring them firſt acquainted with ſin, and take upon them, like the devil on the mount, to ſhow them the world with the pleaſures thereof. But,

2dly, As we may not pleaſe men by doing any thing deſtructive to their ſalvation, ſo neither muſt we pleaſe them by doing that which would endanger our own. If charity to my brother obliges me rather to incur his diſpleaſure than contribute

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to his ruin, ſurely charity to my own ſoul will make me run the hazard of his diſpleaſure, rather than offend my Creator.

It is not allowable for any man to make his pleaſure the rule of his own conduct; much leſs ought another to make his will the meaſure of mine. He who expects me to comply with him, is himſelf bound up by the ſame law that binds me: we are both limited by the law of God; and it is no proper excuſe for either of us that we ſeek to gratify our fellow ſervant, if by ſo doing we diſobey the commands of our common Lord and maſter.

When at any time we conſult the pleaſure, and comply with the deſires of each other, we ought to conſider whether ſuch compliance will or will not be conſiſtent with pleaſing God, which is a duty of prior claim and ſuperior obligation; and if we find it will not, we ought at once to reject the inſidious propoſal, by whatever motives or arguments it comes recommended.

If, for example, our gratitude is addreſſed by the recollection of paſt favours, as an argument why we ſhould not ſtand out, let us always remember, that the mercies we have received from God are greater than any human power is able to beſtow;

that

that they are of earlier date, as well as more in number, and conſequently of ſtronger obligation to a grateful remembrance.

If our ſeducers ſhould addreſs our hopes, and endeavour to convince us that it is our intereſt to comply with their humours; let us not forget that heaven has more in ſtore to reward our virtue than they poſſibly can promiſe, and infinitely more than they can perform.

Should they attempt to ſubvert our integrity by awakening our fears; let us recollect, how much greater plagues hell hath in reſerve, than they can either threaten or inflict. Fear not, therefore, (ſays our Lord) them who kill the body, and after that have nothing which they can do; but fear him who can deſtroy both ſoul and body in hell.

If we chuſe to offend men rather than diſobey God, we may reaſonably hope that his providence will ſhield us from the ill effects of their reſentment: but if, in order to pleaſe men, we offend our Creator, who or what ſhall be able to protect us from the conſequences of his diſpleaſure? If he be angry, the meaneſt of his creatures can execute his vengeance at command; and as no darkneſs can cover us from his all-ſeeing eye, ſo neither is there any defence againſt the power of his omnipotent

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arm. Theſe thoughts ought always to be preſent to our minds, in order to deter us from ſeeking to pleaſe men by any ſinful practices.

Again, men ought to be pleaſed, and good men will be ſo, with ſuch actions as are agreeable to the will of God: to this pleaſure they are intitled, and that they may have frequent opportunities of enjoying it, we ought to let our light ſo ſhine before them, that, ſeeing theſe our good works, they may be pleaſed therewith, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.

I do not ſay that we ought to perform good actions merely for the ſake of pleaſing men; for, then, the motive would take away the virtue of them; but as God has annexed praiſe and eſteem to virtuous actions, which as they are pleaſing to him, ſo they procure to us alſo the good will of men, ſuch actions as theſe are not leſs our duty, but rather the more for being amiable and pleaſing.

* *Whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, juſt, pure, lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praiſe*, our apoſtle directs us to *think on theſe things*; and that not merely becauſe they procure us the love and eſteem of men, but becauſe, being true, juſt, honeſt, and pure, they ought to do ſo.

* Phil. iv. 8.

But though in theſe things we are allowed to pleaſe men, yet we muſt not reſt here; nor muſt the care of pleaſing them be the ultimate end even of thoſe actions that we term virtuous: for this, as I obſerved before, takes away all their virtue, and he who is governed by no better principle than this, acts by a very vague, inſufficient, falſe, and dangerous rule.

Thoſe actions can never be uniform which are directed by a rule capable of change; and, therefore, that man's conduct who acts only with a view to pleaſing men, muſt ever be variable and uncertain: for not only will ſome men be diſpleaſed with what is agreeable to others, which muſt create a degree of doubt and ſuſpenſe about whom to pleaſe, and how to do it; but ſo fluctuating are the minds of men, ſo changeable their circumſtances, and with them their opinions and taſtes, that the ſame actions will not always pleaſe the ſame men: and how then can he who attempts it be ſure of hitting a mark, which is always wavering? Whereas the law of God is ſtrictly and perpetually uniform, and that conduct which would have been deemed a laudable obedience at the time of its firſt promulgation, will be accounted the ſame for ever.

But were the minds of men more fixed and

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ſteady than they are, yet to regulate our conduct upon the principle of pleaſing them, would prove defective and inſufficient; for there are ſeveral degrees and inſtances of duty, to which it would not extend: actions, in themſelves faulty and deficient in many circumſtances neceſſary to make them truly good, may yet, by a ſpecious outſide, chance to pleaſe men. There are many actions, to the preformance of which we are ſtrictly bound, which may not happen to pleaſe men, from their not knowing the motives from whence they proceed; and ſuch we ſhall hardly venture on, if our utmoſt aim be to pleaſe: ſo that this principle, though it would miniſter to oſtentation, has nothing to do with real virtue.

But this rule is not only thus defective, and conſequently inexpedient, but alſo dangerous and not to be truſted.

If the endeavour to pleaſe men be the principal motive of our doing good; if their love and eſteem, their praiſe and approbation, ſeem to us ſuch important objects as we cannot do without, and therefore incite us ſtrongly to the performance of thoſe good actions by which they are ſometimes attainable, we are in great danger of being tempted to evil, when this favourite object is no other way to be obtained: for he who performs good

actions,

actions, only that he may pleaſe men, does not perform them from any ſenſe of their intrinſic worth and excellence, but only as they are pleaſing and agreeable to others. But ſhould bad actions be equally likely to procure the object he aims at, he muſt, in order to be conſiſtent with himſelf, incline to the ſide of vice and immorality. And though this wrong bias on the ſoul ſhould not carry us ſo far, as to do or comply with what is confeſſedly and notoriouſly wicked, yet it is too apt to ſoften our opinions with regard to ſuch actions, as tend to promote an end we ſo aſſiduouſly purſue. At firſt we ſhall wiſh them lawful, and then, by a little artful ſophiſtry, endeavour to prove them ſo.

But the great reaſon of all why we ſhould not make the pleaſure or the praiſe of men the rule of our actions, is that it is a falſe rule. The rule by which we ought to live, is that by which we are to be finally judged; and this is not the will of men, but the law of God.

At that day, when our few good deeds ſhall be ſet againſt our numberleſs tranſgreſſions, thoſe which were done only to pleaſe men, cannot come into the account in our favour. Actions done to pleaſe men can expect no reward but from men; but if to pleaſe God be the aim and deſign of our conduct,

conduct, we have a fair proſpect, nay we have many gracious promiſes, of an ample reward at his hand. We muſt, therefore, always act not as men-pleaſers, but as the ſervants of Chriſt; doing the will of God from the heart with good will, doing ſervice to the Lord, and not to men; knowing, that whatſoever good things a man doth upon this good principle, the ſame he ſhall receive of the Lord in the day of retribution.

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# SERMON XVIII.

MATTHEW vii. 12.

*Therefore, all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them; for this is the law and the prophets.*

THE divine precept I have juſt read to you is a part of that admirable diſcourſe delivered by our bleſſed Lord to his diſciples, wherein is comprehended, in moſt clear and elegant language, the whole ſyſtem of Chriſtian morality.

The words of this precept are ſo plain as to need no explanation, and the ſenſe ſo diſtinct as to be comprehenſible to the meaneſt capacity. Every one endued with common apprehenſion muſt have a ſenſe of right and wrong; and as no one would wiſh to have wrong done to himſelf, the plaineſt and moſt obvious conſtruction of the rule is, that we muſt do no wrong to any other. This is a fair and reaſonable appeal to the common ſenſe of mankind in every caſe between man and man, and directs us to act upon every ſuch occaſion as that

that ſenſe preſcribes, by making every man's caſe our own with whom we have to do.

Since this rule evidently relates to the duty we owe our neighbour, and that only, it is manifeſt that when our Lord declares it to be the ſubſtance of the law, he muſt mean only that branch of the law which relates to the relative duties of life; more particularly thoſe of juſtice and charity. *This is the law and the prophets;* that is, by acting thus ye will do all that the law requires, and all that the prophets have preached or written on theſe ſubjects: but we are not to infer from hence, that juſtice and charity, even in their utmoſt extent, conſtitute the whole law, for neither is this true, nor will the words of the precept bear us out in any ſuch conſtruction: for in chapter xxii. of this ſame goſpel, verſe 37. the duty we owe to God is ſaid to be the firſt and great commandment of the law, and that to our neighbour placed only in the ſecond rank; how then can the whole law be fulfilled, by the obſervance of a precept, which, by the deciſion of the lawgiver himſelf, is but of inferior conſideration? It is true that juſtice and charity are among the weightier matters of the law, and ſo our Lord has placed them; and the preſumption that thoſe who are careful in ſo conſiderable a branch of their

duty,

duty, will not be wanting in the reſt, may be admitted as the reaſon why they are in ſcripture ſpoken of ſometimes as if nothing elſe was needful: but whether the matter of a law be of greater or leſs weight, ſtill ſo long as it is a law, it ought to be obſerved; as our Saviour himſelf has decided upon this very caſe, * *Theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

But it may be of importance to enquire into the reaſon, why our Saviour has thus referred us to our own ſenſe of right and wrong with regard to ourſelves, to qualify us to do what is right and fit by others; which I take to be, that by appealing to ourſelves, we call in our natural paſſions and feelings to aid us in the performance of our duty. There are multitudes of caſes, where the rule of right and wrong cannot be miſtaken by men of common apprehenſion. He that ſteals, or cheats, or who bears falſe witneſs, or knowingly propagates a ſlander, muſt be ſenſible that he acts wrong: but though he knows and ſees the fault, he may feel little reluctance within himſelf to the commiſſion of it; becauſe he feels nothing of the miſchief which his neighbour ſuffers by his injuſtice. If a man did really feels another's miſery, he could not poſſibly bring miſchief upon him.

* Matt. xxiii. 23.

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To feel for another (ſtrictly ſpeaking) is not poſſible; but we may conſider how evils affect ourſelves, and if we obſerve the workings of our own paſſions, it will give us a kind of fellow-feeling for others.

There are ſome acts of injuſtice, hideous and ſhocking to nature. Of this kind is murder, the very thought of which fills us with horror: the reaſon is, that every man feels the value of life in himſelf, and thence makes an eſtimate of what its loſs muſt be to another. But as life is the moſt valuable of all worldly things, ſo ſelf-preſervation is the quickeſt and keeneſt of all our paſſions; and in proportion to this are thoſe checks which nature gives to the thought or intention of taking away the life of another. But as property is leſs valuable than life, and men may ſometimes part with a good deal of it without being much hurt, nature has not ſet ſo ſtrong a guard in this caſe; and therefore here, acts of injuſtice, being leſs flagrant, are much more frequent. Many who will not murder, will yet lie, and cheat, and ſteal. There is not the ſame horror attending actions of this kind as the other; but yet they are ſuch, as that if we would impartially conſider what paſſes in our own breaſt, and apply the divine precept to the caſe in hand, we could hardly bring ourſelves to do an unjuſt ac-

tion. The value of property ariſes from its uſe, and what the uſe of property is, we all know by experience. We feel it in the neceſſaries and conveniencies of life, in our own wants, and in thoſe of ſuch as depend upon us; and if we feel and reſent its loſs as a grievance, ſurely our neighbour muſt do the ſame. When, therefore, you are going to lay violent or fraudulent hands upon your neighbour's property, conſult yourſelf, and if you find ſuch pleaſure in taking it from him unjuſtly, judge what it muſt be to him to keep it honeſtly, and I have not a doubt, but this appeal would oft times prevent the perpetration of fraud and injuſtice.

But bad men are ſeldom diſpoſed to exert this fellow-feeling; becauſe, attending only to the calls of avarice or ambition, they never ſtop to aſk themſelves this plain queſtion, *viz.* How ſhould I like to be ſo treated? The neglect of which renders them void of compaſſion for the ſufferings of others: but a man without compaſſion is really worſe than a brute; as his reaſon furniſhes him with more ways of doing miſchief, and his reſtraints are no greater than theirs. It is not to be ſuppoſed that ſuch men have any religion; for religion would naturally beget in us the love of our neighbour; a principle wholly inconſiſtent with every idea of doing him wrong.

You

You ſee now the uſe of our Lord's direction, when the law is plain and clear. It leaves us under the influence of our natural paſſions to lead us to do righteous deeds. And the ſame inclination which determines the will in the caſes which are plain, will ſerve to regulate the judgment in thoſe which are doubtful or obſcure. Caſes of this ſort will frequently occur in traffic and commerce: for though juſt and equitable gain bears a due proportion to the capital employed, and the expence and hazard of the enterpriſe, yet this is in many inſtances ſo difficult to aſcertain, that he who rigidly ſtands out for the utmoſt he can by any means obtain, will be often in danger of tranſgreſſing the bounds of ſtrict integrity in his dealings: which is as much as to ſay, doing not as he would be done unto. There can be no better direction, in all ſuch caſes, than to follow our Saviour's rule of doing as we would be done by; becauſe the determinations will then always be in favour of our neighbour, ſince all men are naturally favourable to themſelves.

In matters of diſtributive juſtice, the rule is alſo uſeful, though there is not the ſame neceſſity for ſuch frequent application of it: in the affairs of trade and commerce, every man is in ſome meaſure judge and party; and therefore has need of

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ſome check to counteract that ſelfiſhneſs which is too apt to warp us from the ſtraight line of rectitude, when we are to do juſtice between ourſelves and others; but when a man ſits as judge between party and party, and has, or ought to have, no intereſt in the deciſion, he will with leſs difficulty be able to determine juſtly.

Again, in matters relative to public offence, the rule is no leſs uſeful nor leſs ſure; but its application is frequently more difficult; becauſe thoſe tender paſſions, which in other caſes give it force, are apt in theſe to check its operation. When a malefactor ſtands pale and trembling before the ſeat of judgment, ready to receive the ſentence of death, which the law has annexed to his crime, were the judge to attend only to the miſery of the poor affrighted criminal, he might take a bias to the perverſion of juſtice. In this caſe it muſt be remembered, that as there is a compaſſion due to the offender, ſo is there alſo to the public, whoſe peace he has diſturbed, or whoſe laws he has violated; and therefore if he puts himſelf in the caſe of the criminal, he muſt put himſelf in that of the public too; and then the rule will have its full force, and the hand of juſtice be free: for to ſpare one to the deſtruction of many, would not be juſtice but cruelty.

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Thus you ſee the utility of this excellent and comprehenſive rule, in all caſes relating to the juſtice due from one man to another; let us now ſee its uſe in matters of charity, that branch of it eſpecially which conſiſts in giving of alms.

The law of God is plain and expreſs, that thoſe who are rich ſhould adminiſter to the poor according to their abilities; but how much, or to whom every one ſhould give, the law has not ſaid; for this plain reaſon, that every man muſt know his own abilities beſt. Now, in this caſe, when a man is to part with ſomething which he is ſuppoſed to value himſelf, and has nothing to determine him, as to the quantity to be parted with, but his own will, it is highly neceſſary, that he be poſſeſſed of ſuch a ſenſe, as may give him a fellow-feeling for, and intereſt in the misfortunes of his brethren: otherwiſe his hand will be ſhut when it ought to be open; or he will be content with giving a mite, when a talent would perhaps not be more than his juſt proportion, in the account of him to whom we muſt all give an account at the day of judgment. Occaſions can never be wanting to give us this ſenſe, if we will attend to what we ourſelves experience in life. Thoſe who have taſted the bitter cup of affliction, have, in their own misfortunes,

tunes, a powerful motive to pity the misfortunes of others: but all of us have our natural appetites, our natural wants, and our natural gratifications. We know what it is to be full, or to be hungry; to be cloathed, or to be naked; and when we feel the comforts of our abundance, ſurely we may gueſs what muſt be the hardſhips and miſeries of a poor and deſtitute condition.

Let me not, however, in this be miſunderſtood. I am no advocate for the idle and diſorderly; for thoſe who, by indolence and vice, bring on their wants, and had rather beg or do any thing than work: but when you ſee the honeſt and induſtrious ſtriving hard to live, and yet unable with all their efforts to acquire a maintenance for their families, then is the time to aſk yourſelves this queſtion, What might I reaſonably expect my neighbours in affluence to do for me were I reduced to the indigence I now behold? And if, upon ſuch occaſions, you are not touched with a ſenſe of compaſſion, if you are not moved to ſtretch out a hand to their aſſiſtance, it is a ſign that you little conſult your own natural feelings, little attend to the call and admonition of your Saviour; for this is not doing as ye would be done unto.

To conclude, the rule is plain, it is uſeful and

univerſal,

univerſal. We have ſeen that it is alſo applicable to all our tranſactions with our fellow-creatures; and very few indeed are the caſes in which any difficulty occurs in the application of it. May God give us grace conſtantly and honeſtly to put it in practice.

END OF VOL. I.

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